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A BACHELOR'S BLUNDER

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'MATRIMONY' 'THIRLBY HALL' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.



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TO

ARTHUR MALCOLM HEATHCOTE

FROM AN OLD FRIEND

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OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.



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A BACHELOR'S BLUNDER.



CHAPTER I.

MISS LEFROY, THE HEIRESS.

‘HOPE? How pretty! Is that your real name, or are you only called so by your people?’

‘I was called so by my godfathers and godmothers in my Baptism. Have you any objection?’

‘None. I think it is a charming name, like everything else about you; only, as one baby is so very much like another, you know, it seems odd that anybody should have been clever enough to hit upon exactly the right name to call you by. I presume that when you were a baby you had a little round mouth, a little round nose, and little round

eyes, like the rest of the species. No one could have foreseen that you would grow up to—to——'

'To the possession of my present perfect set of features? Possibly not; but why do you say that Hope is exactly the right name for me?'

'I don't know. Something about the curve of the lips perhaps, or about your eyes, which are always rather wide open and look as if they saw something pleasant, or—or—well, I am not a very good hand at explaining myself, but I daresay you understand what I mean.'

It is not unlikely that she did. At any rate she must have understood that he meant to express admiration, and with that degree of comprehension on her part he would probably have been satisfied. This was the first time in her life that she had been addressed with such soft flattery: it was also her first introduction to a London ball-room. The glitter of the great crystal chandeliers, the amazing profusion of flowers which loaded

the air with faint odours, the sparkle of innumerable diamonds, the steady, ceaseless hum of a multitude of voices, the rhythmic strains of the Hungarian band, to which her little feet kept unconsciously beating time upon the polished floor—all these things excited her unaccustomed brain, and filled her with that intoxication of joy in existence which belongs to youth alone. If it added something to her happiness to be seated beside an exceedingly handsome young guardsman and to listen to the nonsense which it pleased him to talk, she assuredly did not differ very much in that particular from other persons of greater age and experience.

But Captain Cunningham did not suppose himself to be talking nonsense at all. ‘The Goddess of Hope,’ he went on presently, ‘must have been the very image of you; that is, if there ever was such a being. I’ve forgotten my gods and goddesses since I left school.’

‘You must have a remarkably short memory.’

‘Ah, you say that because you think I’m so young ; that is what everybody thinks. But you’re wrong ; I’m quite old in reality—twenty-four the very next third of August as ever is, little as you might imagine it. I suppose,’ he added, turning up his face towards her with a sort of innocent gravity, ‘I do look awfully young ; don’t I?’

She scrutinised his small, refined features, his dark blue eyes with their long lashes, his close cut black hair and the smiling mouth, above which there was but the faintest indication of a moustache, and answered : ‘Well, yes ; you do. But I don’t think I should mind that much if I were you. We shall none of us either look young or be young for more than a few years.’

‘Let us make the most of our time while it lasts, then. Shall we take another turn?’

She nodded ; he gave her back her fan (upon which the monogram of H.L. had afforded him an excuse for asking her what H. stood for), and soon they were gliding

swiftly round the room with the other dancers.

After all, the best moments of life are more connected with trivialities than we care to admit, and happiness, which we are told not to expect in this world, and which certainly is a very different thing from placid contentment, comes and goes in flashes, seldom leaving behind it any rational explanation of its visits. It is doubtful whether, even in communing with her own heart, Hope Lefroy ever made such an admission as this: ‘I was happy once. It was on a summer evening in a big London house; I was waltzing with the handsomest man and the best dancer in the room; the lights and the colours and the voices went swimming round us like things in a dream; I almost forgot my identity, and the music seemed to be part of us—or else we were a part of the music. Somebody said: “What a lovely girl!” and somebody else said: “That is Miss Lefroy—the great heiress, you know.”’ Nevertheless she had to wait a long time before another quarter of an hour

such as that came to her. The above fragments of conversation were the only words which reached her ears, and these, fortunately, were not acute enough to catch the remarks made by a good-natured person seated near the door to a lady with a hook nose and double eyeglasses and somewhat anxious expression of countenance.

‘My dear Lady Jane,’ the good-natured person was saying, ‘do you know that this is the fourth time running that your niece has danced with Bertie Cunningham. Isn’t that just a little bit dangerous?’

The lady with the hook nose said: ‘I trust not.’

‘Really I think it is. Bertie has three hundred a year from his father, and debts, and the face of an angel. He is always in love with somebody, and what is worse is that somebody is always in love with him. One can’t check these things too soon.’

‘One can’t dash into the middle of a ball-room and drag one’s niece out of danger by the hair of her head. I will speak to her

when I get an opportunity. The truth is that she knows no more about—about everything than a child in arms. Charles has kept her down in the country half her life, and I doubt whether she would ever have had a season in London at all if I had not come to the rescue.'

'How good of you!'

'I suppose you mean how foolish. Very likely it was, only it did seem such a pity that she should remain buried in the depths of the midlands and perhaps end by marrying the curate. Still, people ought to look after their own daughters; I am sure I have enough to do to look after mine. Of course, if anything interesting happens I shall get no credit, and if there is a catastrophe I shall be blamed. I wonder why younger sons are always so good-looking, while their elder brothers are invariably ugly, or go in for eccentric fads, or have fits, or something horrid!'

'Because there is a good deal of rough justice in human affairs. The elder brothers

don't need personal advantages; the younger ones are given handsome faces in order that they may get on in the world and marry rich Miss Lefroys.'

'You never would say such things if you knew how uncomfortable it makes me to hear them. Please take me to the supper-room, and let us think about something more pleasant.'

A tall, loosely-built man, neither young nor old, with a long moustache and no other hair about his face, turned to a brisk elderly gentleman who was standing beside him and asked abruptly: 'Is that your niece, Lefroy?' The elderly gentleman replied: 'Yes, that is my niece. A handsome girl, isn't she?'

'Very. To whom are you and Lady Jane going to marry her?'

'To nobody that I know of. We have brought her up to London to give her a little amusement; she hasn't had too much of that, poor girl!'

'You don't intend her to marry Cunningham, do you?'

‘Cunningham? What Cunningham? That boy in the Scots Guards, do you mean? Hardly! All the same I should be glad if she would marry somebody.’

‘Why?’

‘Because my brother Charles has heart-disease. You needn’t mention this, you know, but the doctors tell him he may go off suddenly at any moment; and, of course, when poor Charles dies——’

‘Oh, I see; you would find her confoundedly in the way then. You’re good-natured sort of people, but there is nothing you hate like being made uncomfortable. Don’t mind my saying so, do you?’

‘Nobody ever minds what you say, Herbert, and I confess I don’t like being made uncomfortable. For the matter of that, I don’t know who does. I tell you what: I wish you’d marry the girl yourself.’

‘No use, Lefroy; the mothers gave me up long ago. Ask any dowager you like. I’ve had an asterisk before my name for the last ten years. No, I can’t help you in that way,

but I'll give you a bit of gratuitous advice: don't let her see too much of Cunningham. Not that there's any particular harm in him, only she ought to do better, I should think.'

Meanwhile, the subject of so much free discussion was happily unaware of having made herself in any way conspicuous. When the waltz was over she very properly requested her partner to take her back to her aunt, but as Lady Jane was not to be found—being indeed at that moment busily engaged with aspic and champagne elsewhere—she readily assented to Captain Cunningham's suggestion that they should 'go and sit down somewhere.'

It may be that Captain Cunningham's mental gifts were not quite upon a par with his physical ones; at any rate, his stock of conversational topics seemed to lack variety. 'Hope,' he murmured, as he sank down upon a sofa beside his companion, 'I think it's the prettiest name I ever heard.'

Something in the manner of his intonation certainly made it sound pretty, and the girl

answered simply: 'I never thought of it as being especially so before, but now that you mention it, perhaps it is rather pretty. It doesn't mean anything though. I was called after my mother, who, I believe, was called after an old Mr. Hope who left her people some money. So, you see, if my parents wished to express any sentiment at all in giving me my name, it must have been gratitude.'

It is doubtful, however, whether that sentiment had had any place in her parents' mind at the time of her birth. If they had called her Disappointment it would more nearly have expressed their feelings. To own a large entailed estate, to have remained a considerable number of years childless and then to be presented by Heaven with a daughter, is not among the experiences which evoke prompt thanksgiving; nor was Mr. Lefroy the kind of man to take comfort from thinking that his daughter's advent might in due season be followed by that of a son or sons. 'I know what it will be,' he said

resignedly, when he was told the news; 'I shall have twelve little girls now.' But outrageous Fortune did not deal with him quite so hardly as that, for he never had another child of either sex, and when he lost his wife he was too advanced in years to think of marrying again.

Thus Hope became a great heiress, Mr. Lefroy being a rich man independently of his acres. For generations past, as various collateral branches of the family had withered away, money had poured in upon the successive heads of the house, sometimes in dribblets, sometimes in considerable streams, as it has a way of doing upon those who do not require it; and over this accumulation Hope's father had, of course, undisputed control. During his lifetime the hoard had increased greatly. At first neither he nor his wife had been able quite to forgive their little daughter for not being a boy. Without being in the least unkind to her they had not cared to see much of her, and had willingly committed her to the care of the best nurses and governesses that

money could procure. They had spent a large portion of their time in London and in foreign wanderings, while the child was left in the pure country air of her home, which, as they said, was so much better for her. The sight of her reminded them of their disappointment, and to Mrs. Lefroy in particular conveyed something in the nature of a tacit reproach. To her dying day the good lady did not altogether get over this feeling, and, conscientiously though she strove to conceal it, never succeeded in so doing; but when Hope was about ten years old, her father's point of view underwent a sudden and complete change. Either because the child was so pretty and so winning in her ways or because his own nature was an affectionate and his wife's a somewhat cold one, he began to worship the little heiress to whom he could bequeath neither house nor lands. It occurred to him that, so far from his having a grievance against her, it was she who had the best right to complain of her sex being what it was. He at least would live and die in the old place;

but she must, some day or other, give up the home that she loved to the heir of entail; and what might have seemed no hardship at all if she had had a brother, assumed a very different aspect when it was a case of retiring in favour of an uncle or cousin. So Mr. Lefroy set himself to save money, and accomplished with little effort a task which to most people is both difficult and painful. Since Hope could never be Miss Lefroy of Helston Abbey, she should at any rate be Miss Lefroy the heiress—an heiress so great that she would be able, if it should so please her, to raise a second Helston elsewhere, as Helenus founded a new Troy on the shores of Epirus. This saving process did not bring about any curtailment of daily luxuries, but it made it necessary—or so Mr. Lefroy declared—that he should live quietly at home and give up his London house, and to that plan Mrs. Lefroy, who during the last years of her life was a confirmed invalid, offered no opposition.

When Hope was between fifteen and sixteen her mother died; and after that she and

her father became closer companions than ever. Their companionship, indeed, was somewhat too close; for each found the other's society all-sufficient, and they mixed less with their friends and neighbours than was good for either of them. During the hunting season they were occasionally seen—a spare, melancholy-looking man, very well turned-out, and a fair-haired girl whose sunny face developed into greater beauty year by year—but nobody got much beyond bare civilities with this couple, and the vast house in which they lived was rarely enlivened by visitors. From time to time relations were asked down to stay; but the relations found it so intolerably dull that they were generally telegraphed for on the second or third day, and had to leave precipitately. Sometimes, too, a stray artist would be invited to partake of Mr. Lefroy's hospitality; and the artist, as a rule, enjoyed himself. He could not but be glad of the opportunity of studying the Helston Abbey picture-gallery, which was not open to the public, and he was sure of being treated with

the utmost consideration and respect by his host, who was himself an amateur painter of no mean ability, and whose love for art of every kind was second only to his love for his daughter. When Mr. Lefroy took Hope up to London for a few days—as he did every now and then—it was almost always in order to attend a sale at Christie's. The old man was well known in the King Street rooms, where, in former years, he had been a frequent purchaser. He no longer bought much, having another use for his money now ; but it pleased him to examine the treasures exposed for sale, and nobody knew better than he did whether these fetched more or less than their value. There is every reason to believe that he would have gone on taking his daughter to art sales, and imagining that by so doing he was giving her the greatest of possible treats, had he not chanced, on his way back from one of these entertainments, to encounter his sister-in-law Lady Jane.

Lady Jane stared very hard, not at him, but at his companion, and muttered under her

breath : ‘Really, it is too bad!’ What she saw was a tall, well-grown girl, with a slightly aquiline nose, a quantity of golden hair very unfashionably arranged, and a pair of large, wide-open, grey eyes. Nobody ever beheld whiter or more even teeth than this girl displayed presently when something made her laugh, nor could there be anywhere, in London or out of it, a more exquisite complexion. It really was too bad ; and there was nothing for an aunt of proper feeling to do but to promise her niece a London season and disappoint her not, though it should be to her own hindrance (for she herself had two unmarried daughters, whose beauty was of a less striking order).

The next day Lady Jane called on her brother-in-law, and pointed out to him that the time had come for Hope to be presented at Court and to assume her place in society. ‘If you won’t take her about, we must,’ she said ; and Mr. Lefroy assented with a sigh—the more willingly, perhaps, because he had just returned with a rather graver face than usual from consulting his doctor.

‘It must come some day, I suppose,’ he remarked. ‘It is a pity. Hope is perfect as she is, and you will do your best to spoil her among you. Still, I suppose it would have had to come some day. I wish I knew how it would end!’

‘I daresay I can tell you,’ his sister-in-law replied, laughing a little; ‘it will end in the natural way.’

What Lady Jane considered natural was that the girl should ere long become engaged to some unexceptionable person, chosen for her by her thoughtful relatives; but perhaps it was even more natural that at Hope’s first ball she should be sitting in a retired corner with an attractive young guardsman, and communicating to him the greater part of the personal history set forth above.

Her auditor appeared to take a lively interest in all that she told him. He was a young man with many connections and more friends; from the day on which he was gazetted to his battalion society of every sort and kind had been open to him, and, as he

himself would have said, he 'knew his way about pretty well.' If he had not studied feminine nature very exhaustively, he had at any rate had sufficient opportunities of doing so, and not long before this time he had gravely confided to a brother officer, as the result of his observation, that one woman was uncommonly like another. However, he had never met anyone quite like Miss Lefroy before; and it is perfectly possible that, even if she had not happened to be the prettiest girl in the room, he would have been captivated by her manner, which had the kind of self-possession that children have before they grow old enough to be shy, besides an amusing little touch of condescension every now and then, due, no doubt, to the circumstance that Miss Lefroy had hitherto been thrown more amongst social inferiors than amongst equals.

'Are you fond of shooting?' she asked. 'If you are, you might run down to Helston some time in the autumn and pay us a visit.'

The young man passed his hand across his

lips to smooth away a smile. 'You are very kind,' he answered gravely; 'but hadn't I, perhaps, better wait until Mr. Lefroy asks me?'

'You would have to wait a long time, I am afraid. It very seldom occurs to my father to invite people to stay; although when they come he is generally the better for it, I think. Probably, if there was anybody else in the house, he would hardly notice whether you were there or not. And I should like you to see Helston.'

'I should like to see it very much. It must be rather an odd sort of place in some ways.'

'Odd? What do you mean?'

'Well, it seems to produce things that don't generally grow in the country. Young ladies, for instance, who dance as beautifully as if they had been doing nothing else all their lives, and who can snub a humble acquaintance without any difficulty.'

'Is that because I said my father wouldn't notice you? I should not have supposed that

you would mind ; but perhaps you are not so humble as you make yourself out. Unfortunately, my father is rather absent-minded, and there is only one way of attracting his attention that I know of : have you ever painted a picture ?’

‘ Can’t say that I ever have ; but I dare say I might manage it if I tried.’

‘ Oh, you think so ? Decidedly humility is not one of your failings. Now I, who have been patiently learning to draw and paint ever since I could hold a brush or a pencil, never ventured to submit a composition of my own to my father until about a month ago. And how do you suppose he received it ?’

‘ With tears of joy I should think.’

‘ No ; if he had shed tears they would not have been tears of that kind, I am afraid. He screwed up his eyes and stroked his chin, and looked very much inclined to run away ; and then he said : “ My dear, I can see that you have taken great pains over this.” Farther than that he couldn’t go, much as he would have liked to go farther. It only shows——’

‘That Mr. Lefroy ought to be deprived of his daughter until he learns to appreciate her,’ broke in a voice from the background, at the sound of which the girl turned round with a little cry of pleasure.

‘You at a ball!’ she exclaimed. ‘After this nothing will ever surprise me again.’

The intruder advanced, holding out a long, lean, gloveless hand. His clothes hung loosely upon a massive frame; his shirt-front was crumpled; the white tie, knotted round his throat, looked more like a huge pocket-handkerchief than anything else; and these trifles, quite as much as a certain rugged grandeur about his square head with its grizzled beard and its mane flung back from the brow, made him a conspicuous figure among that crowd of men who, old and young alike, were turned out after an identical neat pattern.

‘Why may I not have a treat every now and then, like other people?’ he asked, smiling. ‘When we parted, Miss Hope, I should have said that nothing was more unlikely than that

our next meeting should take place in a ball-room; yet here we both are, you see. The difference between us is that you take to it as a duckling takes to water, whereas I am altogether out of my element. The difference between age and youth, in short.'

Hope laughed: 'Are you not enjoying yourself?' she asked.

'Do I look as if I were enjoying myself? Still, I have enjoyed watching you. It's a new character, and I can't deny that it's a becoming one, though I think I like the other best. Honestly now, which do you prefer, dancing or painting?'

'Will you wither me with scorn if I say dancing?'

'Not I! I only wish I were of an age to agree with you. Dance away, Miss Hope, there's a time for all things. Only thank Heaven and your father that you have a pursuit to fall back upon. Sooner or later, the day comes when we all need that. Work and tobacco have been my two best friends in life. I shouldn't like to see you with a pipe

in your mouth ; but I shall always be glad to see you standing before an easel.'

'You think I have the makings of an artist in me, then?' asked the girl, with some eagerness.

'That is not the question,' returned the other, and strode away unceremoniously.

'Who is that very—abrupt old party?' inquired the guardsman.

'Don't you know?' exclaimed Hope. 'Why, that is Mr. Tristram.'

'The thought of my ignorance makes me blush all over ; but I am obliged to confess that I am not much the wiser.'

'Oh, you *must* be ! Surely you must have heard of Tristram, the great artist?'

'Oh, *that* Tristram ! Yes ; I've heard of him, of course ; seen his pictures too. They're a little beyond me, I think, though I've no doubt they are magnificent, as everybody says so. I never met him before ; he doesn't look exactly the kind of person whom one would be likely to meet, does he?'

'That would depend upon what company

you keep, I suppose. He is the kind of person who knows everyone that is worth knowing.'

'So much for an unlucky beggar whom he doesn't know! Lady Jane, I wish you would come and take my part; I'm catching it like anything because I'm not on terms of intimacy with all the Royal Academicians.'

But Lady Jane, who had just borne down upon the couple, did not seem at all disposed to take the part of this impecunious and rather forward young man. She ignored his appeal, and said to her niece, with some little severity of tone: 'My dear Hope, I couldn't think what had become of you! We are going home now.'

Captain Cunningham, however, was not the man to let himself be so summarily disposed of. He accompanied the ladies downstairs, helped Miss Lefroy into the carriage, stood for a few minutes talking to her after she was seated, and took care to find out what her engagements for the next day were before he bade her good-night.

Half an hour later, when Hope was in her

bedroom, she noticed that a strip of white ribbon which she had attached to the handle of her fan was missing; and among other memory-pictures which passed before her drowsy eyes ere they closed, was a vision of a young man in evening dress standing in the open doorway of a brilliantly lighted house, and thrusting something—could it be a scrap of white ribbon?—into the pocket of his coat. The vision, it may be assumed, was not wholly displeasing to her; for she fell asleep with a smile upon her lips. *Honi soit qui mal y pense!* She saw no reason to grudge the poor youth such a trifle if he valued it, being as yet ignorant of the important part that ribbons play in the affairs of this world: of how great men will bribe and scheme to get a blue one, and victorious generals swell with satisfaction when they are permitted to hang a red one round their necks, and how young guardsmen with a few hundreds a year cannot possibly be entitled to ribbons of any colour—or even of no colour, such as white ones.

CHAPTER II.

BAD NEWS.

MR. MONTAGUE LEFROY, M.P., was a man against whom no one had ever been found cross-grained enough to say a word. It is not necessary to be great, wise, witty, or munificent in order to gain the love of your fellow-creatures, whose demands, after all, are moderate enough, and who ask little more of you than that you shall have a pleasant face, decent manners, and wine which may be swallowed without danger to the health of the swallower. All these titles to esteem Mr. Montague Lefroy possessed, besides a very nice house in Eaton Square, where guests were ever welcome, and a still nicer house in the midland counties, with excellent shooting attached, and a sufficiency of hunting within easy distance to satisfy most people.

It is not every younger son who can boast of such advantages ; but a poor Lefroy would have been a contradiction in terms. This one had inherited a good round fortune, and many years back his elder brother had handed over to him for his sole use and behoof the house and estate of Southcote, which, though humble by comparison with the grandeurs of Helston Abbey, was yet a large enough place to content any unambitious country gentleman. Mr. Montague Lefroy was not ambitious, and was perfectly contented. He had always been able to gratify his tastes and at the same time to live within his income. In early life he had gone in for racing in a modest way, but had abandoned this form of amusement as his family grew up. He had a yacht ; but, for reasons of which he made no secret, he seldom took her out of the Solent. From the age of four-and-twenty he had sat uninterruptedly for the southern division of his county, and took a good-humoured, amateurish sort of interest in politics. It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that he was a Conservative ;

yet he could make allowance for the notions of other men. Radicalism rather amused than alarmed him. He had, as he said, 'gone into the whole matter' at the commencement of his career and had formed opinions which he had never since seen reason to change. Doubtless the world was far from perfect, and there were social problems and anomalies which were apt at first to unsettle the mind of the earnest inquirer; but, when once you had realised that these things existed by the will of Heaven, it was all plain sailing. If there was anything so clear as to need no demonstration, it was that in all communities there must be rich and poor: it had been so from the beginning; to all appearance it would be so up to the end. Therefore let every man strive to do his duty in that state of life unto which it had pleased God to call him, and cease to repine because he was not somebody else.

The voice of this optimistic legislator was not often heard at St. Stephen's; but when he did speak it was in an easy, colloquial

manner which invariably charmed and tickled his audience. For a quarter of a century or more he had watched with benign equanimity the forward march of Democracy, voting against it of course, but not conceiving that the Constitution was in any immediate peril: the passing of Mr. Gladstone's Irish Land Act was perhaps the only thing that had ever given him a serious shock. Against it he had felt bound to deliver one of the few speeches with which he is credited in the pages of Hansard. Let us make no mistake, he said; this was nothing less than a revolutionary measure. He candidly confessed that he did not know much about Ireland himself; had only been there once; was glad to say that he owned no land there, and was willing to accept provisionally the statements of honourable members who claimed to be better informed. What he did know was that the rights of property must be considered as the foundation-stone of the social edifice; and the House might take his word for it that, when once they began chipping and hammer-

ing at that, they would have the whole blessed building down about their ears sooner than they expected.

There was a good deal of laughter at this, and somebody wished to know whether the expression ‘blessed building’ was Parliamentary. The Speaker ruled that it was; and Mr. Lefroy, having said his say and done his duty to the country, crossed his legs and went to sleep. A subservient majority, as we know, passed the Act, and the consequences must be upon their own heads. They cannot at any future date plead that Mr. Montague Lefroy did not warn them of what they were about.

Hope was fond of her uncle, who also was fond of her—as indeed he was of most people. When she came downstairs on the morning after the ball she found him alone at the breakfast-table, and he looked up from his newspaper to say :

‘See what it is to have country habits! I do not suppose your aunt and the girls will put in an appearance for another hour.

Well, I hope you enjoyed yourself last night?’

‘Immensely,’ answered Hope, with fervour.

‘As much as all that? Don’t overdo it, you know. I mean, enjoy yourself as much as you please; only, if I were you, I would try to enjoy myself with a rather larger number of people. Variety is salutary.’

‘When one is dancing, one can only talk to one’s partner.’

‘Yes; but one need not talk to the same partner throughout the evening. Especially if his name happens to be Cunningham.’

‘Is there anything against Captain Cunningham, Uncle Montague?’

‘Well, I believe he is rather a flirtatious young gentleman.’

‘He didn’t flirt with me,’ said Hope calmly.

‘*Didn’t* he? I wonder what you define as flirtation at Helston! Besides, he hasn’t a sixpence.’

‘Poor fellow!’

‘Oh, poor fellow as much as you like;

but you had better not become too friendly with him. In point of fact,' added Mr. Lefroy, confidentially, 'I expect you'll get into a row with your aunt if you do.'

Hope did not care to pursue the subject. 'Is there anything in the *Times* this morning?' she asked.

'Not much. Another big bank gone smash, I see; the Bank of Central England. The paper says lots of people are hit by it—people whom one knows, I mean. How any man can be such a lunatic as to hold shares in an unlimited concern passes my comprehension. I recollect Charles speaking to me about it; I hope to goodness he isn't a shareholder.'

'Oh, dear, no!' answered Hope. 'Fancy Papa running any risks! He wouldn't sleep quietly if he was getting more than four per cent. for any investment.'

'I suppose not. Well, I must be off. Remember my little hint, there's a good girl. After all, one man does to dance with pretty

nearly as well as another, and it isn't worth while to vex your aunt.'

This Mr. Lefroy said both because he had long ago become personally convinced that it was never worth while to vex Lady Jane, and because he had discovered that his niece was fond of taking her own way. It will be perceived that he was not quite the most skilful diplomatist in the world. Hope made no rejoinder; but when he had left the room she said to herself that, whatever her future conduct with regard to Captain Cunningham might be, it certainly would not be influenced by fear of her aunt's displeasure.

Her cousins, Alice and Gertrude, joined her presently. They were pleasant, good-humoured girls, having inherited the paternal disposition; they had neat figures, and were rather pretty than otherwise, though without much to boast of in the way of feature. Although one of them was a year, and the other two years, older than Hope, they had always entertained a high respect for her—not only because she was an heiress, and to

all intents and purposes her own mistress, but because, as they frankly admitted, she did everything better than they did: talked better, played better, and danced better, besides possessing an artistic talent which they looked upon as prodigious. In all matters relating to dress they had a blind faith in her taste, of which they availed themselves whenever they could. They proposed to avail themselves of it now.

‘Hope,’ said Gertrude, ‘wouldn’t you like to come with me and help me to choose a hat? As sure as I attempt to select anything for myself that I think particularly becoming, so surely is the result enough to make angels weep. I can’t conceive why things should look so very different in the shop from what they do when they are sent home.’

‘Oh, and Hope,’ put in Alice, ‘would you very much mind coming on to the dress-maker’s afterwards? She would never dare to snub you as she does me, and I know exactly what I want, if I could only get her to listen. We can have the carriage, because

Mamma changed her mind after she had ordered it, and said she wouldn't go out this morning.'

A woman who dislikes shopping may be an admirable person ; but in the eyes of the impartial observer there is apt to be a slight *primâ facie* case against her, as there is against a man who dislikes tobacco. Hope answered, quite truthfully, that she would be delighted to accompany her cousins. Probably, also, she was not unwilling to avoid the chance of a private interview with her aunt, for which, on account of some reason or other that she did not care to examine too closely, she felt disinclined at that especial moment. One cannot give reasons for all one's feelings ; nor, as a general thing, is it in the least desirable that one should. Hope, as she was driven in an open carriage from shop to shop, through the sunny smoky mist which gives the atmosphere of London a peculiar golden tinge in fair weather, was conscious of being in high spirits—in higher spirits, it might be, than there was anything to warrant—but, like

a true philosopher, she accepted the pleasant fact, and did not attempt to pry into its cause.

What was certain was that the appearance of the entire city had marvellously changed for the better. She could hardly believe that these were the dull ugly streets along which her father had been wont to hurry her during their flying visits to the Metropolis, and where the last thing that one would ever have expected would have been to recognise an acquaintance among the crowd of uninteresting people that thronged them. They wore a cheerful animated aspect now, and were quite full of friendly faces. Several young gentlemen with high shirt-collars and bouquets in their buttonholes raised their hats to the three girls as the carriage passed; ladies in other carriages nodded and smiled; everything and everybody seemed to be proclaiming that it was the season, that all the world was in town, that Miss Lefroy had been to a ball last night, and that she was going to another to-night. Near Buckingham Palace

they met a detachment of the Guards, with fifes and drums and an officer, the point of whose nose could be discerned beneath his bearskin. One of the girls exclaimed : ‘ Surely that is Captain Cunningham ! ’ And though it was not Captain Cunningham—for the nose turned up ridiculously, and was quite unlike his—still it might have been ; and there was something very exhilarating in the discovery that, after all, one may sometimes chance upon an acquaintance in London without previous appointment. Hope had always hitherto supposed that it was far too huge a place for that.

It was past two o’clock before they were back in Eaton Square, and as they got out of the carriage Alice remarked that she believed some people were coming to luncheon : it appeared that people dropped in to luncheon almost every day in that house. Hope found them in the drawing-room when she went downstairs after changing her dress.

To the last day of her life she will remember those people, and their names, and the

clothes that they wore, and how they looked : the long cool room darkened by sun-blinds ; the blaze of flowers in the windows ; Lady Jane stifling a yawn ; the little fat man, bubbling over with laughter, who was telling a story about somebody who had been chucked over his horse's head in Rotten Row ; and then the door opening suddenly and her Uncle Montague coming in, with a pale, grave face. Instantly she felt that some calamity had befallen her. When her uncle stepped hastily to her side and whispered : ' My dear, will you come into the next room with me for a minute ? ' it was as if all this had occurred at some previous time ; the little dark library into which he led her had a familiar look, though she had never entered the room before ; she seemed to know exactly what his next words would be.

' Hope, my dear, can you be ready to go home with me in half an hour ? Your father has been taken ill.'

' I am ready now,' she answered, quite quietly.

Lady Jane had followed them ; the two old people were looking at her with kindly, distressed faces. They were urging her to do something : what was it ? To eat ? She smiled a little, and answered that she was not hungry ; she would rather start at once.

‘No, no ; plenty of time,’ her uncle said. ‘If we start in half an hour we shall catch the 3.20, and your maid can follow with your things by a later train. Run downstairs now and get some luncheon ; or tell them to bring it up to you if you would rather have it in your own room. I can’t tell you anything ; I have no particulars—only a telegram,’ he added hurriedly.

Hope understood that he was anxious to get rid of her ; so she went away without a word.

As soon as the door had closed Lady Jane asked : ‘What is it, Montague ? Anything very serious ?’

Her husband handed her a telegram. ‘From the butler,’ he said.

‘Good heavens! how dreadfully sudden!’ exclaimed Lady Jane, dropping her eyeglasses and the telegram, which last consisted of only the following five words: ‘Mr. Lefroy died this morning.’

The heir of Helston Abbey and its dependencies blew his nose. To do him justice, he was not thinking about his inheritance at that moment, and had never at any time been eager to enter upon it. ‘Poor Charles! poor old fellow!’ he said. ‘The last time I saw him he told me his heart was all wrong; but I never expected this. Somehow, one never does expect—confound it all! Jane, I can’t tell that poor girl. Wouldn’t—couldn’t *you?*’ he added, appealingly.

Lady Jane shrank back. ‘Surely it would be better to get her home first. I can go down to-morrow, if you wish.’

‘Only, of course, she will have to be told to-night.’

The truth was that neither of these worthy people had any taste for discharging painful duties. Life had been made very easy for

them, and on the rare occasions when anything unpleasant had to be done, each generally tried to get behind the other. This system of tactics, if persisted in, is tolerably sure to bring about a collision between the manœuvrers, and thus it was that Mr. Montague Lefroy, who abhorred collisions, commonly found himself in the post of honour. He accepted it now without much protestation: indeed, he could not but admit that there was reason in what Lady Jane urged, and that it would be wiser to get the journey over before allowing his niece to guess the full extent of her misfortune. The only question was whether the journey could possibly be got over without an explanation of some kind.

Happily for him, it was so—or nearly so. On taking his seat in the railway carriage, he hid himself behind a newspaper, round the corner of which he peered cautiously from time to time at Hope, who, seated opposite to him with her chin upon her hand, was gazing abstractedly out of the window. Her

apathy surprised him more than it need have done.

In truth, the girl had little confidence in her uncle. She knew that whatever the news might be he would make the best of it; perhaps also, at the bottom of her heart, there was an unacknowledged fear which kept her silent. Nevertheless, when the distance was about half accomplished, she made an effort and said :

‘May I see the telegram, Uncle Montague?’

‘The telegram? Dear me! I’m afraid I left it behind!’ answered Mr. Lefroy, glad to be able to say so truthfully.

‘What were the words?’

‘I—I don’t exactly recollect,’ replied her uncle, not quite so truthfully this time.

Hope sighed and made no further inquiries; her one wish was to reach home. But when at length they did reach Helston Abbey, when they had driven across the park, in sight of the great house to which she dared not lift her eyes, and when the old

butler came down the steps to meet them, with his face twitching and quivering—then she knew that home was home no longer, and that that wish of hers could never be fulfilled.

CHAPTER III.

MORE BAD NEWS.

THE word 'never' is scarcely understood by any of us, so completely are we the slaves of time ; and perhaps it is even more incomprehensible to the young than to their elders. The blow which had fallen so suddenly upon Hope Lefroy was so far easier to bear that it stunned her as it fell, and, for twenty-four hours at least, rendered her incapable of really feeling anything. Nevertheless, she had all her wits about her. She knew quite well that her father was dead ; she had seen his body lying, stiff and silent, in what had once been his bedroom, and had kissed the cold forehead. She had heard the sobbing servants relate how it had all happened ; how the newspaper

had been taken up to the study as usual, directly it arrived; how, about five minutes afterwards, Mr. Goodwin (the butler) had fancied he heard a fall, and, hurrying upstairs, had found his master lying, face downwards, on the ground; how a groom had been despatched immediately for the doctor, who, on his arrival, had pronounced death to have been instantaneous—‘his very words, Miss Hope.’ All this she had listened to without a tear; the only thought that made her shudder for a moment was that while her father had been lying dead she had been laughing and chattering with her cousins in the London streets, and saying to herself what a pleasant thing life was.

Her uncle was amazed at her calmness. He patted her on the shoulder and called her a brave girl, not knowing very well what to say by way of comfort to one who seemed so little in need of being comforted. When he remarked: ‘We will get your aunt and the girls down; you mustn’t be left all by yourself, you know,’ she answered quickly: ‘Oh, please

don't ! it would be such a pity to interfere with all their amusement,' and then gave a little nervous laugh. Of course there could be no more amusement for them that season.

'I don't know what to make of her,' the worthy man said to his wife when she arrived ; 'she's as cold as a block of ice. That will never do ; she'll be getting a brain-fever or something, if we don't mind. You must manage to make her cry somehow.'

But time and nature accomplished what might, perhaps, have proved beyond Lady Jane's powers. The girl's numbed senses woke with throbbings of pain which increased every hour ; she began to realise her desolation, and if tears were what was wanted to preserve her from an illness she was soon safe. Her aunt and cousins were as kind and sympathetic as it was possible for them to be ; but it was not possible for them to sympathise in any true sense. They had never really known the dead man, nor could they know the extent of her loss. All the incidents of their long companionship came back to her ;

she remembered, as everyone does at such times, a hundred trifling instances of his thought for her ; he had not been specially demonstrative, it was not his nature to be so ; but every now and then he had spoken a tender word or two which had been all the more valued for their rarity. She had never had a plan, or a pleasure, or an anxiety, with which he had not been connected, and now he was gone and the world was empty. All day long a song of Shelley's, which he had been fond of and had often made her sing to him, kept ringing in her head : ' Death is here, death is there '—everyone knows the lines :—

All things that we love and cherish,
Like ourselves, must fade and perish.
Such is our rude mortal lot,
Love itself would, did they not.

Perhaps the significance of the last words escaped her ; at any rate, she might be permitted to doubt their truth. As she sat alone, with her hands before her, she said to herself again and again that she could never be happy any more ; she was too young to

know that sorrow is as much doomed to fade as all other things.

Like is cured by like: there is no more certain remedy for trouble than a second dose of the same upon the top of the first. The treatment may not be an agreeable one; but it is generally found bracing by those who have any constitution in them to be braced or any courage to be roused. Of courage Hope Lefroy had always had plenty, and she was soon to discover that she would have need of all that she possessed. One day, about a week after the funeral, her maid came in to say: 'If you please, m'm, could Mrs. Mills see you before she leaves? She's going away this afternoon.'

Hope was sitting in the spacious, sunny room which she had been wont to use as a studio. Her painting materials lay where she had left them before her departure for London; the unfinished picture upon which she had been engaged stood upon its easel, covered with a cloth; she had dragged an arm-chair into the bay-window, where of late

she had sat, hour after hour, gazing idly at the flowers in the garden beneath, which went on blooming for their new master as they had for the old, and had no consolation to offer her. Only once since her return had she gone downstairs, and that had been to follow her father's body to the grave. Relations, connections, and friends had assembled in large numbers to pay the last tribute of respect to the late owner of Helston Abbey; some had spent a night in the house, and a few had penetrated into Hope's room to take her by the hand and utter the halting commonplaces which must be uttered at such times. Every day her aunt or one of her cousins came and sat with her for an hour or so, and she managed to talk cheerfully to them about this, that, and the other, but she had not yet felt able to take her place in the dining-room, nor had anyone pressed her to do so.

‘Mills going away!’ she said, with a bewildered look. ‘Why is she going away?’

‘Well, m'm,’ answered the maid, looking

down, 'she says she ought to be with her husband now.'

Hope sighed. Of course there must be changes, and of course old faces must vanish. Mills was the first to go; others must follow, she herself must go soon, she supposed. Certainly it was time that she began to think of these things. 'Ask Mills to come in,' she said.

Shortly after Hope's birth Mills had been engaged as nurse, and she had never left Helston since. After her services were no longer required she had been retained at the child's earnest entreaty—in what capacity it would be difficult to say. She was supposed to be generally useful, and perhaps she was so; in any case a servant more or less could make little difference in so large an establishment.

Somewhat late in life Mills had taken it into her head to marry the second coachman, a man considerably her junior; but her matrimonial fetters had not weighed heavily upon her. When her husband, by way of bettering himself, had taken service with a London

doctor in a large practice, she had never dreamt of accompanying him to his new home. Time enough for that, she said, when Miss Hope married. So long as Miss Hope was Miss Hope she meant to remain with her. But now, it seemed, she had changed her mind. She came in presently—a tall, gaunt woman, past middle age, with a face of wavering outline, like a potato, and features which suggested that the second coachman had been moved to espouse their owner by some other incentive than love. Her nose turned up, the corners of her mouth turned down, and, to complete the list of her charms, she had a pair of goggle eyes, which just now were swollen with recent weeping. Yet her face, like many other plain faces, was not disagreeable to look at, its expression being one of quiet, honest kindness. Her late master had been wont to say of her that she was as ugly as a bulldog and as faithful.

‘Sit down, Mills,’ said Hope. ‘So you are going to leave me, I hear.’

‘Ah, Miss Hope,’ answered the woman,

lowering her angular person stiffly to the edge of a chair and sighing, 'it isn't for my own pleasure that I leave you, Lord knows! But I don't feel it's right for me to be eating Mr. Montague's bread; and George writes me that he's took the house and got the furnitur' in; on'y he can't do nothink about lodgers till I come, he says. So I thought to myself, "Sooner or later it has got to be done, and the sooner the better, maybe," I thought.' And she heaved another prodigious sigh.

'Do you mean that you are going to keep lodgings in London, and be worried from morning to night by horrid, dirty servants, and by people who will accuse you of stealing the sugar, and will smoke in the drawing-room, and make themselves obnoxious in all sorts of ways? You won't like it, Mills.'

'I daresay not, Miss Hope.'

'Then why do you do it? Why don't you stay with me?'

'Ah, my dear, I can't do that. I used sometimes to think I'd no business stopping on here, taking my wages and not earning my

keep, even when—when—things was different. But now——’ And Mills sighed for the third time.

‘Don’t sigh like that, you silly old Mills ; you make quite a draught in the room. Staying with me doesn’t mean staying at Helston. We must both look out for a new home soon ; but I should like to keep you with me. And I shall want a coachman, I suppose. Couldn’t we entice George away from the doctor?’

Mills gasped, made a hideous grimace, and then, to Hope’s consternation, burst into tears. ‘Oh dear, oh dear!’ she sobbed, ‘don’t talk like that, child ; you’ll break my heart! To think that your uncle should turn you out of your own house!—for it *is* your house, as I’ll maintain in the face of all the judges and juries in the land. Laws indeed! Bother their laws! Call this a free country and then tell me that a father mustn’t leave his own property to his own child! Mr. Montague didn’t ought to take the place, and I don’t care who hears me say so.’

‘I am afraid he can’t help it, Mills,’ answered Hope, smiling. ‘It is no more his to give away than it was poor Papa’s.’

‘Then he ought to make it up to you in money,’ said Mills, drying her eyes. ‘It can’t be right that he should be so rich, whilst you—you——’

‘As far as that goes, I am rich too,’ Hope remarked.

Mills appeared to be upon the brink of another outburst of sobbing; but she restrained herself and, getting up, walked to the window.

‘My dear,’ she said, after a pause, ‘if you was as rich as Creases you couldn’t live all by yourself. Helston must be your home till you marry; and glad and happy your uncle and aunt will be able to keep you. I will say for them that I *believe* they’ll be proud to keep you, and let you have your old rooms and your pianner and your horses and all, same as you’ve always been accustomed to. But I can’t ask them to keep me, nor yet I wouldn’t ask them. Let alone that George is a young

man and wants looking after. You'll come and see me sometimes when you're in London, won't you, my dear?' she added.

'Of course I will, if you insist upon living in London,' said Hope; and after a little more conversation, and some shedding of tears on both sides, Mills prepared to depart.

Hope wanted to give her ten pounds as a small parting gift; but this the old woman would not hear of. 'No, child, no,' she said; 'keep your money and take care of it; it's—it's always a useful thing, and none of us knows how soon we may need ten pounds.'

This oracular speech, and indeed the woman's whole manner throughout the interview, raised some suspicions in Hope's mind. What if she should prove to be less rich than she had supposed herself? It seemed impossible that she should be poor; yet if Mills had meant anything at all she must have meant that. Wealth had always been to Hope Lefroy what health is to those who have never known a day's illness; it was a blessing for which

she was thankful in a general way, but which she hardly appreciated at its full value, since she was quite unable to imagine what life would be like without it. She was not at all alarmed by her old nurse's hints, only disturbed and a little curious. She determined to lose no time in finding out from her uncle what her position was, and therefore made it known that she would be present at luncheon that day.

She did not notice a brief moment of embarrassment which marked her entrance into the dining-room. Never having been accustomed to take either the head or the foot of the table, she made at once for her usual place, which happened to be on Mr. Lefroy's right hand, thereby unconsciously earning the approval of Lady Jane, whose horror of unpleasant situations was equalled only by her dislike for those who created them. But, despite this happy commencement, the conversation languished wofully. To be afflicted is to be an affliction to one's neighbours, and Hope's company would have been cheerfully

dispensed with by everyone present ; especially by Mr. Lefroy, who guessed only too well what had brought her among them, and foresaw that a bad quarter of an hour was in store for him.

His fears were confirmed when his niece lingered after the others had left the room and intercepted a futile attempt at escape on his own part. 'Are you busy, Uncle Montague?' she asked. 'If you are not, I should like to have a little talk with you.'

Mr. Lefroy admitted that he was not busy—at least, not very busy ; but gave it as his opinion that a brisk walk in the fresh air was a much better thing for people who had been shut up ten days in the house than a dry talk about business matters.

'Perhaps I will take the walk afterwards to counteract the effects of the talk,' Hope replied. 'I won't keep you long, Uncle Montague ; I only wanted to ask you how much money I shall have?'

'Oh, well, you know, one can't answer questions like that all in a moment ; there

really is no hurry,' Mr. Lefroy was beginning; but Hope, who noticed the cloud that had come over his good-humoured face, was not to be put off in that way. 'You need not be afraid of telling me the truth,' she said; 'I don't expect it to be pleasant.'

'Some confounded fool has been chattering to you!' exclaimed Mr. Lefroy suspiciously.

'No; not a confounded fool; only poor old Mills. And she didn't chatter; she merely sighed. Please, let me hear the worst.'

Mr. Lefroy sighed almost as loudly as Mills had done. 'Very well, then,' he said desperately, 'let us get it over. *It is* the worst—quite the worst that you can imagine. Do you remember, on the morning of your poor father's death, my mentioning to you that the Bank of Central England had failed?'

'I remember perfectly well,' answered Hope steadily. 'He was a shareholder, I suppose.'

'Yes; I am sorry to say that he was. Heaven only knows what can have tempted him—however, there's no use in talking about

that. The unhappy fact is that he did hold shares ; and of course the estate is liable.'

'To a large amount?'

'It is impossible to say as yet,' Mr. Lefroy began, and then paused. 'I think you would rather that I spoke the plain truth,' he resumed with somewhat of an effort ; 'I am afraid that the claims made will swallow up the entire estate—every penny of it.'

Hope gave a little gasp ; she had not anticipated such a catastrophe as this. 'Will Helston have to be sold?' she asked in a low voice.

'Helston? Oh, no ; they can't touch the entailed property ; and if they could, that wouldn't affect you, my dear. But it seems certain now that the whole of your fortune will be lost. It's a bad business,' he added, 'a dreadfully bad business, and I believe it would have killed your poor father if he could have foreseen it. No doubt, indeed, that *was* what killed him.'

'Oh !—do you think so?' exclaimed Hope.

‘Well, yes—the shock, you know. But in any case we could not have hoped to keep him with us much longer; he told me some time ago that the doctors had given him his death-warrant. However, what I was going to say was that, bad as matters are, we must try to make the best of them. After all, when one looks the thing in the face, what does it amount to? Why, only that, instead of being an heiress, as you might have been, you are in the same position as Alice and Gertrude. Some day, no doubt, you will all three marry; and if I know anything of Lady Jane, you will marry men who are able to give you the comforts that you are accustomed to. Until then your life won’t be an unhappy one, I hope. We can’t make up to you for the loss of your father; but as far as money goes—well, you know, we are not badly off, and I don’t see why you need feel any difference. Everything will go on just as before.’

‘You are very kind, Uncle Montague,’ answered Hope; ‘but it is not possible that things

should go on just as before. If I have no money of my own, it seems to me that I ought to try and make some, and not be a burden upon you.'

'A burden!' exclaimed her uncle indignantly; 'what do you take us for? Why, I owe more to my brother Charles than you could spend if you lived with me to the end of your days and went in for every kind of extravagance! How many years do you suppose I was at Southcote without paying a shilling of rent? Now, I'll tell you what it is, Hope; if you ever want to make a speech which will vex and hurt me more than anything else that you could say, you will repeat the remark which you made just now. Please to understand, once for all, that you lay yourself under no sort of obligation to anybody by living here as you have been accustomed to live.'

'I should not mind being under an obligation to you, Uncle Montague,' answered Hope, with a faint smile; 'it isn't that.'

'What is it, then?'

‘I am not sure that I can explain ; I must have time to think. Anyhow, I will gladly stay with you for the present, obligation or no obligation.’

‘You will stay with us until your wedding-day,’ said Mr. Lefroy decisively. ‘And now let us behave like sensible people, and not worry ourselves with crying over spilt milk. Suppose we enter into an agreement never to refer to this subject again ?’

Hope did not see her way to making any such promise ; but she was quite of her uncle’s mind as to the folly of crying over spilt milk ; the more so as lamentation over the loss of her fortune would have seemed to her something like a reflection upon her father’s memory. Upon the whole, Mr. Lefroy was very well satisfied with her reception of the bad news, and confided to his wife that night that Hope was a girl in a thousand.

‘There was no bother about making her understand the state of the case ; she took it in at once, and never so much as gave a groan. The best thing that we can do for her now

is to find her a suitable husband as soon as we can.'

To which Lady Jane replied: 'That will not be quite such an easy matter as it would have been a week or two ago.'

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

THE bread of charity must always taste bitter, be the hand that bestows it never so generous, and it did not take Hope long to decide that the plan proposed by her uncle was one to which she never could consent. She might, and indeed must, accept his hospitality ; she might even make Helston in some sense her home ; but her pride, of which she had rather more than was quite desirable, revolted against the idea of pensioned luxury. The law that bound her was the law to which all humanity is subject. ‘I have no money, and therefore my first duty is to make some,’ she said to herself, as though that were the easiest thing in the world.

The next question was, how was a young

woman who had suddenly dropped from affluence to pauperism to set about supporting herself?—and the only answer that could be made upon the spur of the moment was a little disheartening. There seemed to be nothing for it but to go out as a governess or as companion to an old lady, for neither of which employments could Hope feel that she had the smallest natural aptitude. But in the course of a few days her uncle made a communication to her which simplified matters greatly and caused her heart to leap with joy.

‘Oh, by-the-way, Hope,’ he said, joining her one morning after breakfast in the garden, where she was pacing to and fro in grave meditation, ‘I want to tell you that I exaggerated a little in saying that your poor father’s estate would yield absolutely nothing. We have rescued a trifle. It is only a trifle; but such as it is I have invested it for you as your trustee, and it will bring you in about 250*l.* a year.’

The excellent man was telling a falsehood which anyone with the least knowledge of

business matters must have detected at once. It was impossible that any investment of the late Mr. Lefroy's personal property could have been made so soon ; nor was there a chance of ever so small a portion thereof being saved from the wreck ; but he had confidence in his niece's inexperience ; and his confidence was not misplaced, for neither then nor at any subsequent time did Hope suspect that the six thousand pounds invested in her name had come out of the pocket of her guardian and trustee. He had argued with himself that it would be necessary to make her an allowance of some kind, and that if she could be led to suppose that the said allowance was hers of right, much needless and painful discussion would be avoided. Had he foreseen in what light this unexpected windfall would be regarded by its recipient, it is probable that he would have stayed his hand ; but where is the man wise enough to divine the queer notions that will get into girls' minds ?

Hope's notion, if a queer one, did not appear so to her. Her course was now clear,

and she felt herself free to utilise the one talent with which, as she believed, nature and education had endowed her—that of painting. It must be said for her that she was an amateur artist of far more than ordinary proficiency, and also that her expectations were strictly moderate. She had learnt enough to know how much remained for her to learn, and she did not deceive herself into thinking that she would be able to sell her pictures for some time to come. What she did think was that, with the aid of her small fortune, she could begin to study in serious earnest, and after an hour or two of consideration her plan assumed definite shape. Upon 250*l.* a year one could live. This she repeated to herself several times with decision, because in reality she was not quite certain of the fact. The place of her abode must, of course, be London; and a most fortunate thing it was that Mills' lodgings would afford her a shelter to which nobody could take exception. As regarded the course of study to be pursued, she meant to put herself in the hands of Mr.

Tristram, who, she knew, would befriend her and give her the best advice in his power.

With that celebrated and eccentric man her relations were already those of intimacy. Her father, who had discovered Tristram's genius long before it dawned upon the reluctant critics, had always delighted in his society, and would often run up to London for no other purpose than to spend an hour or so in his studio. Hope, as a child, used to take a mute part in their conversations, understanding very little of them, but gazing in fascination at the gigantic figure of the artist as he strode up and down the room, declaiming, gesticulating, pouring torrents of scorn and invective upon some person or persons unknown, while her father, his hands folded upon the knob of his stick and his chin upon his hands, sat listening with a smile and every now and then putting in a quiet word. One day Tristram became aware that his audience consisted not only of an elderly gentleman but also of a girl whose face was as nearly as possible perfect in outline, and whose wide-

open eyes expressed all sorts of things, hidden perhaps from the world at large, but perceptible to the artistic imagination. He came to a halt before her and stood with his hands in his pockets staring fixedly at her for a minute or two. Then in his abrupt way he said: 'Miss Lefroy, I am going to paint your picture.'

Nobody making any objection, the picture was painted, and exhibited in the Royal Academy of the following year, where it attracted a good deal of notice. It could hardly be called a portrait: Tristram was not a portrait-painter. In the catalogue it was described as 'Hope: portrait of Miss Lefroy;' and certainly nine-tenths of those who admired it saw in it rather a representation of the treasure which Alexander the Great is said to have reserved for himself after dividing his possessions among his friends, than of Miss Lefroy, whoever she might be. But if not a portrait, it was at least a likeness and an admirable one; and the father of the model was considerably taken aback and a little

annoyed when, on inquiring the price of the work, he was curtly informed that it was not for sale. 'I mean to keep it,' the artist said. 'I shall never paint anything better; and, besides, I have taken a fancy to your daughter's face; it cheers me up when I have a fit of the blues.'

This was, perhaps, a somewhat cool proceeding; but Tristram was not a man who troubled himself to consider whether his proceedings were cool or not, and those who valued his friendship had to accept him as he was. Hope, liking the man, liked his peculiarities, and did not dream of being offended with him because he sometimes spoke roughly to her, or because he smiled at the compositions which she ventured to submit to his notice. His smile, to be sure, was not a discouraging one. Without being loud in his praises, he admitted that she was making progress and that her drawing was fairly correct. 'Ah, Miss Hope,' he said one day, 'what a pity it is that you will never have to work for your living!' The phrase

recurred to her memory now that she was resolved to work for her living.

Thus, by degrees, and by the pressure of other thoughts, Hope's great sorrow became more bearable to her; but although her intentions with regard to the future were now fixed, she took very good care to say nothing about them as yet to anybody. There would be very little use in her moving to London before the autumn, and none whatsoever in divulging too soon a scheme which was certain to provoke opposition. So she kept her own counsel, submitting herself outwardly to the wishes of her uncle and aunt, who did all that they could to render the change in her position as little evident to her as possible. They had every wish to be considerate, and when, in the month of August, they moved to Southcote for a few weeks, and she begged to be left behind at Helston, they yielded to her entreaties, although Lady Jane did not quite like it. It may be that they would have been less amenable, had they not wanted to ask a few friends down to stay, and felt that the

presence of the orphan in her black crape might be rather a restraint upon the cheerfulness of the younger members of the family.

That period of solitude and liberty Hope enjoyed so much that she more than once reproached herself for her good spirits. She worked at her painting with a new and professional interest, she rose early and wandered out across the park and along the grassy shooting-drives that intersected the woods; in the evening she usually went out for a ride, attended by the same sober old groom who had first taught her to sit upon her pony. She was free to come and go as she pleased; she had no one's convenience to consult but her own, and her own company did not weary her. But the return of 'the family,' as the servants had already taken to calling the new inmates of Helston Abbey, had been announced for the middle of September, and punctually on the appointed day they arrived, bringing with them two or three of the guests whom they had been entertaining at Southcote. 'Only quite intimate friends, almost relations in fact,'

Lady Jane whispered, after she had embraced her niece. 'Of course we would not ask anyone else just now: but your uncle won't go out shooting all by himself, and it is so bad for him to have no exercise.'

Hope did not feel that the case was one which called for apologies. Being human, she could not quite enjoy seeing others in possession of what had until lately been to all intents and purposes hers; but the addition of a few somewhat taciturn sportsmen to the party was no increase of her trial. Only one of them had the good fortune to interest her; and perhaps she would not have noticed him, had she not remembered to have seen his face at the one and only ball which she had attended, or was now likely to attend, in London. He was a tall, thin man, with sunburnt face and hands and a long moustache; his frame was rather loosely put together, but he had the appearance of muscular strength and good condition; his voice was a pleasant one, notwithstanding a drawling intonation, which, combined with his habit of keeping his

eyes half closed, conveyed an impression of constitutional indolence ; and his face, Hope thought, was pleasant, too, though certainly not handsome. She mentally set him down as middle-aged, and did not consider the definition an incorrect one when she heard that he was just six-and-thirty. The girls, of whom she inquired his name, told her that he was Dick Herbert, 'a sort of cousin of Mamma's,' and added that he was great fun ; but when asked in what way his funniness displayed itself, could only repeat their assertion, without supporting it by instances.

'Everybody knows him and everybody likes him,' they declared. 'He has lots of money, and he has never married and says he never will, which, of course, makes him the more interesting. He always does just as he likes, and says whatever comes into his head.'

This description, as Hope pointed out, seemed to apply to a person more funny than agreeable, but her cousins assured her that Dick was both. 'He is a dear old thing,' they

said. Alas ! it is thus that maidens of twenty or under will speak of a man in the prime of life, and the truth is that Mr. Herbert was getting a little grey about the temples.

One evening after dinner, when the men came into the drawing-room, he steered straight for the sofa upon which Hope was sitting, and dropped down beside her. She thought he was going to say something, but apparently he had no such intention, and after he had quietly contemplated her from beneath his eyelashes for several minutes, she broke the silence by remarking: 'You find Helston rather a dull place, I am afraid?'

'I? Oh, no; the people are a little bit dull, some of them; but I shouldn't call the place so. Besides, I can go away when I've had enough of it. I always do go away as soon as I begin to get bored anywhere.'

'And do you generally stay until then?'

inquired Hope, with a smile.

'No, because, as a rule, I have a pretty good lot of engagements from about this time of year onwards. I'm rather a good shot,

you see,' he added, by way of explaining this circumstance. He relapsed into silence for a time, and then startled Hope a good deal by resuming : ' I say, shall you go on living here ?'

' It would be natural that I should, would it not ?' she answered, not being ready with any reply to so unexpected a question.

He shook his head. ' Not to you ; some people wouldn't mind, of course. Still,' he concluded pensively, ' I don't see how you can very well do anything else.'

He so evidently did not mean to be impertinent that Hope could not feel affronted. She took a long look at his face, which was an honest, friendly sort of face, and a strong inclination to divulge her project to him took possession of her. It was not that she wanted his advice, for her resolution was taken, but even the most independent of mortals like to be backed up sometimes, and it struck her that Mr. Herbert would probably back her up in this instance. She could not, however, make a confidant of a man whom she scarcely knew, but she thought that perhaps she would

do so at some future time if they became better acquainted.

They did become better acquainted, and their acquaintance ripened with singular rapidity. Somehow or other, Hope constantly found herself left in his company, and though he did not talk much, his manner encouraged her to talk a good deal, while his unceremonious ways set her at her ease. He treated her, she thought, much as a good-natured elder brother might have done; she was a thousand miles from suspecting that Lady Jane was designedly throwing her at the head of one of the most desirable bachelors in England, or from perceiving the various stratagems by which that well-meaning woman was trying to effect her purpose. Mr. Herbert, who understood it all perfectly well, understood the girl's innocence also; otherwise it is probable that his engagements would have called him away before he had been three days at Helston.

A person who is disposed towards making confessions is seldom thwarted through lack

of opportunity. It happened one afternoon that Mr. Herbert, who tired of partridge-shooting more easily than his host, was wending his way homewards with his gun under his arm, when he encountered Miss Lefroy at some distance from the house; and she, seeing no reason why she should not turn and walk with him, consulted her own wishes in the matter. They conversed for some time upon various unimportant topics—or rather, Hope conversed while her companion listened—then, *à propos* of nothing at all, he said:

‘Do you know, Miss Lefroy, I feel rather bothered about you?’

‘In what way?’ Hope asked.

‘The outlook doesn’t seem to me very promising. How do you get on with Lady Jane? Does she ever have tantrums?’

‘Never, that I am aware of,’ answered Hope.

‘I expect she does, though, or her husband wouldn’t be always stroking her down. I shouldn’t wonder if she was rather an old cat when she was rubbed the wrong way.’

‘Please remember that you are speaking of my aunt,’ said Hope.

‘Well, you didn’t make her, though she is your aunt; and she is no blood-relation of yours, after all. Upon my word, if I were you, I think I should try to get out of this before the wind changed.’

‘I think I shall,’ said Hope quietly; ‘though not exactly for that reason.’ And without further preface she unfolded the scheme which she had planned out for her future career.

Herbert did not interrupt her. The only comment that he permitted himself, after she had done, was: ‘There’ll be a nice row when you tell them!’

‘I suppose so; but I fancy that I shall be able to survive that.’

‘Very likely; you seem to have plenty of pluck. But, to tell you the truth, I think you will have to give up this idea after a bit. I know something about an artist’s life, because I have a young *protégé* who is going to set the Thames on fire some fine day, and I hear

about it from him. He is up in London now, studying. Of course that sort of Bohemian existence is all very well for him, for his name is Jacob Stiles—did you ever hear such a name!—and he had no father to speak of; but it would be a very different thing for you. A woman can't get out of her own class.'

'Yet you advised me just now to get out of Helston?'

'That's another matter. Of course marriage is the only means of escape open to you.'

'Thank you,' said Hope rather coldly; 'but I don't feel inclined to adopt that means.'

'I suppose you are not of age yet?' observed Herbert, after reflecting for a few minutes.

Hope confessed that she was not.

'So that if old Lefroy won't hear of your going in for the painting business, you'll be about done, won't you?'

'I shall try to get him to consent, at all events,' replied Hope. 'You are not very encouraging,' she added, in a rather injured tone.

‘I don’t mean to be. You’ll have no end of a fuss before you get your own way; and, besides, I don’t much fancy the notion of your living in London lodgings all by yourself. Still, perhaps, as you say, it might be worth a trial. Anything for liberty.’

Hope changed the subject and regretted having introduced it. From a man of Mr. Herbert’s independent character rather less conventional language might have been expected, she thought, and he might at least have displayed a little interest in what he had been told. She did not give him credit for being more interested than he chose to appear; nor did she know that it was in order to do her a service that he deserted her after dinner that evening, and seated himself in a distant corner beside Lady Jane.

‘That niece of yours,’ he remarked casually to his hostess, ‘is an uncommonly clever girl.’

‘She is a clever girl, and a pretty girl, and a *good* girl,’ said Lady Jane emphatically.

‘Yes, all that. There are plenty of pretty girls about, and I am quite sure that there

are a fair number of good ones ; but it isn't every day that you meet a girl who can paint like Miss Lefroy.'

'H'm—well, no ; I daresay not,' agreed Lady Jane, who was not very strong as an art-critic.

'I was looking at some of her pictures the other day,' Herbert went on, 'and I was very much struck with them—I was really. It seems a thousand pities that so much talent shouldn't be utilised.'

'Do you mean that she ought to sell her pictures ?'

'Why shouldn't she ? It's an honourable profession, and, under present circumstances, I suppose the money would be welcome to her. Of course she might not find purchasers for the things that she has done already ; but after a year or so of study I do believe she would turn out an artist.'

'There is no necessity for Hope to make money ; but I am sure I shall be very glad to let her have lessons when we are in London,' Lady Jane said, graciously.

‘Oh, I don’t mean that sort of thing; you can’t learn an art in that way. To do any good, you must go in for the thing thoroughly—live in London, you know, and give up society and work hard. I was talking to her about it to-day. If only there were some respectable person whom she could board with—however, I suppose it couldn’t be managed.’

‘Really,’ said Lady Jane, ‘I don’t quite see how it could.’

‘No—oh, no; it was only a dream of mine.’

He said nothing more for a while; but when Lady Jane was beginning: ‘I look upon dear Hope quite as one of my own daughters now——’ he interrupted her with: ‘If ever I marry, which isn’t a very likely event to come off, I shall marry a woman who can *do* something. I could make a friend of a woman like that; I should never be able to stand a wife who had only a pretty face and nice manners. Upon my word, I’d as soon marry a lady-doctor.’

‘My dear Dick,’ returned Lady Jane af-

fectionately, 'you will never marry at all; and to be quite candid, I shouldn't care to see any girl whom I was fond of married to you. You are too fastidious and fanciful.'

This she said to show her dear Dick how guiltless she was of any designs upon him; but that night she remarked to her husband, with a certain quiet triumph: 'Montague, I am going to astonish you.'

'I am sorry to hear it,' said Mr. Lefroy, apprehensively.

'You need not be sorry; it is nothing unpleasant, only something very surprising. I have discovered that Dick Herbert has fallen over head and ears in love with Hope.'

'Oh,' said Mr. Lefroy, 'I could have told you that some days ago; but falling a little bit in love isn't quite the same thing as marrying. Added to which, it don't follow that she is in love with him. You had better prepare yourself for a possible disappointment.'

'I am always prepared for disappointment,' Lady Jane declared; 'but if I know anything of the ways of girls, Hope will not

refuse Dick. My only fear is that he will take a long time making up his mind to propose, and perhaps will never do it at all.'

He certainly did not do it before his departure, which took place two days later; but at the last moment he took occasion to whisper to Hope: 'I think I've helped you a tiny bit. Don't broach the great plan for a day or two, and mind you are extra civil to your aunt. She is capable of taking your side if you keep in with her.'

CHAPTER V.

THE DOCTOR INTERVENES.

‘COME!’ said Mr. Lefroy, persuasively. ‘I think we might arrive at a compromise if we tried. You say that your life is your own to dispose of, and that you wish to devote it to the service of Art. As a fact, your life is not altogether at your own disposal just yet; but we will waive that. Let it be agreed that henceforth the chief aim and object of your existence is to be the painting and selling of pictures. So be it, and I shall be delighted to help you in any possible way; only allowing you to live all by yourself in London lodgings is not a possible way.’

It was on a misty October day that Mr. Lefroy, in the course of an interview with his niece, thus delivered himself. He was sitting in his study, which had once been his brother’s

study, and was still full of his brother's books and odds and ends. He was sorry to be obliged to receive Hope there; but what could he do? He must have a den of some kind and he could not shut the room up. Nevertheless, the influence of the place caused him to listen very patiently to what the girl had to say, and prevented him from meeting her request with a blunt refusal.

‘You yourself must see,’ he continued, ‘that it would never do for us to turn you adrift like a friendless orphan; but you can have the best masters and attend classes, or Schools of Art, or anything that you like, while we are in town; that is to say, from early in March till the middle or end of July. Have you any objection to make to that proposal?’

‘Only that it would altogether defeat my object,’ answered Hope, smiling. ‘I want to be a professional artist, not an amateur; and I want something else, too, but I am afraid you won’t like my saying so, Uncle Montague—I want to be independent.’

‘My dear child, you might as well say that you want to be Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, and Defender of the Faith. Not that you would be independent then. Great as the charms of independence are, very few of us—certainly very few young ladies—are permitted to enjoy them. Let us take comfort from the thought that perhaps it wouldn’t be good for us if we were.’

‘I should not wish to be independent if Papa were living, or if I were your daughter,’ Hope said. ‘I think you understand what I mean.’

‘I decline to understand. My position towards you is that of a father; I regard you as being, for all practical purposes, one of my daughters, and I can only say to you, as I should to Alice or Gertrude in a similar case, that your demand is outrageous.’

‘That is hardly fair, Uncle Montague,’ returned Hope, her colour rising slightly. ‘I did not expect you to be pleased at my wishing to leave Helston; I know it must seem ungrateful, though I am not really

ungrateful; but I can't see that I am asking for anything outrageous.'

'Very well, I withdraw "outrageous." Nowadays I find that I can never open my lips in the House without being called upon to withdraw something; so that the sensation is not new to me. I will substitute "amazing." You can't object to "amazing"; it is a term which may be applied to the noblest forms of ambition. My dear Hope, your ambition may be a noble one and a creditable one—far be it from me to assert the contrary!—but it has the fatal defect of being impracticable. Girls of your age can't go off and set up house by themselves; that sort of thing isn't done.'

'Yet, if I had been an heiress, it might have been done.'

'Really, I don't think so. You would have been my ward, in any case, until you were of age, and I could hardly have consented to your living apart from us. However, we need not consider what might have been. Come, Hope; give up this extravagant

project—well, well, I withdraw “extravagant,” the project can go without an adjective, since it is to be thrown overboard—give up thinking about it, and, as I said before, I’ll do the best I can for you. I’ll speak to your aunt.’

‘Couldn’t we speak to her now, Uncle Montague?’

‘Heaven forbid! Do you wish to see Lady Jane stretched upon the floor in a fit? What I meant was that I would speak to her about your taking lessons in London.’

But Hope, who had been tentatively sounding her aunt for some time past, and had been surprised at the amicable spirit in which her hints had been taken, was less apprehensive than Mr. Lefroy; and at that moment, as luck would have it, Lady Jane herself walked into the room, bringing with her some letters as to which she wished to consult her husband. Hope at once opened the attack all along the line, without any preliminary skirmishing.

‘Aunt Jane, do you see any harm in my

going up to London to study painting? I should live with Mills, who would take the greatest possible care of me, and I know Mr. Tristram would put me in the way of learning what people who adopt Art as a profession ought to learn. I *must* do something, and I *may* learn to be an artist; I feel that I shall never learn to be anything else.'

Mr. Lefroy closed his eyes and waited for the storm to burst. He opened them again to their fullest extent at the first sound of his wife's voice and fixed them upon her face, which, to his profound astonishment, was wreathed in smiles.

Lady Jane was shaking her head gently. 'My dear child,' said she, 'you are far too sensible to have ever imagined that such a thing as this could be possible, and you need not tell me who put it into your head. It is Dick Herbert all over. Dick is a dear, good fellow; but you should beware of taking him too literally. He has defied conventionality all his life, and of course there is no reason why he shouldn't, if he chooses; but it is too

bad of him to have given you the idea that you could do the same. However, he has most likely forgotten all about it by this time.'

'It was not Mr. Herbert's idea, it was my own,' replied Hope; 'and it is quite the same thing to me whether he remembers or forgets it. Why should you say that I am defying conventionality? It is only as if I were going to school; and you would not mind my doing that if I were a year or two younger. Oh, Aunt Jane,' she continued, laying her hand upon her aunt's arm and speaking with a little quiver in her voice, 'please let me go! I can't stay here. You are all very kind; but—but—oh, don't you see that I *can't* stay?'

Lady Jane did not see it at all, and did not like the tone that her niece was taking up. 'My dear,' she answered, drawing away her arm, while the smile faded from her face, 'you really must try to be more reasonable. Ask me for something that I can give you, and I shall be only too glad to make you

happy; but you can't expect me to countenance this extravagant scheme.'

'We don't withdraw "extravagant" this time,' murmured Mr. Lefroy; but his interruption was not heeded. Hope went on pleading, at first humbly, then passionately, then tearfully; but Lady Jane kept her temper and maintained her authority, and the end of it was that her niece had to withdraw from the field, vanquished.

The girl's disappointment was very bitter. She had set her heart upon getting her own way, and experience had not taught her that those who get their own way in this world do so more commonly by circuitous than by direct means. The worst of it was that, upon reflection, she could not help seeing how much more plausible her aunt's case was than her own. She was to be allowed to take lessons during five months of the year, if she was so minded; all that was denied to her was independence—and, as a matter of abstract theory, a girl of nineteen certainly should not wish to be independent. 'I must wait until I am

twenty-one, that is all,' she said to herself, and the prospect was not a smiling one. To go on living as a stranger in her old home—how could she endure it? A hundred little daily rubs and worries, which, for being quite inevitable in her position, were not the less galling, recurred to her mind, and she could no longer make light of them. She had nothing to set against them now, nothing to look forward to, for who can look two whole years ahead? Hope's disposition was naturally sweet and sanguine; she was determined not to sulk because she had been thwarted, and she tried to go about with as cheerful a face as usual. But in private she brooded and fretted until at last she made herself so ill that the doctor had to be called in.

The doctor was a cheery, good-humoured little man who had known Miss Lefroy from the day of her birth. A very few questions and answers sufficed to show him what was the matter, and on being led into the library by Lady Jane, he asked whether he might be permitted to suggest a moral prescription.

‘Please suggest anything that you like,’ answered Lady Jane, resignedly. ‘I know what you are going to say: the poor girl is not happy. But how can I help it?’

‘Oh,’ said the doctor, ‘I think you can help it. Do you know, Lady Jane, I was once summoned to attend a little boy in a humble rank of life who was consumed with anxiety to go to sea. He was not fit for it; he hadn’t the constitution for it, and he had never been accustomed to being cuffed. He was the only son of his parents, who naturally couldn’t endure the thought of his being flogged with a rope’s end and possibly drowned. They reasoned with him, they scolded him, I am not sure that they didn’t even give him a gentle whipping; but it was all no good. The boy literally pined away, and at last they got frightened and sent for me. I had a good deal of difficulty in prevailing upon them to let him do as he wished, but I succeeded in the end, and when a year was up he returned from his first and last voyage, radically cured. He is now a respectable carpenter in a good

way of business, and when he takes his wife and family for a day's holiday he goes anywhere rather than to the seaside.'

'That is all very well,' said Lady Jane, 'but suppose he had liked a seafaring life?'

'In that case I presume that he would have made a good sailor; and there are worse people than good sailors in this world. I am not competent to give an opinion as to whether Miss Hope will ever become an artist or not, but I don't hesitate to say that there is nothing like a personal trial of the realities of life for dispelling visions and making young ladies and carpenters' apprentices contented with their respective lots.'

Lady Jane stroked her chin with her eye-glasses. 'Perhaps,' she said meditatively, 'there may be something in that. For my own part, all I wish is to do what is right, and if we do decide to follow your advice, I shall feel easier about asking down a few friends whom Mr. Lefroy wishes to have here for the covert-shooting, and whom we really ought to ask. While dear Hope is in the house I quite

dread inviting anybody ; because, although she says nothing, I can see that it is painful to her. On the other hand, if we send her away people are sure to say that we want to get rid of her. Still, if you, as her medical attendant, are quite convinced that she ought to go to London——’

‘I have not a doubt of it,’ replied the doctor, with a perfectly grave face and a twinkle in the corner of his eye. ‘It is true that your niece is at present free from organic disease, but I daresay you are aware that in every human body there is a predisposition towards one form of ailment or another, and Miss Hope’s low, nervous condition is especially favourable to the development of—er—active mischief. In short, if she is vexed or crossed, I will not be answerable for the consequences.’

‘That,’ observed Lady Jane with a sigh of resignation, ‘is conclusive. Health should be the first consideration, and since you order Hope to London, I must not venture to disobey you.’

Thus Hope obtained her freedom after all ; not because she had asked for it, or because it was good for her, or because anybody really thought it desirable ; but because young Lord Middleborough had paid a good deal of attention to Alice during the past season ; because Lord Middleborough liked pheasant-shooting ; because it was impossible to ask him to Helston without inviting a party to meet him ; and, finally, because ‘the doctor ordered it’ is, or ought to be, a sufficient answer to any ill-natured persons who might accuse a fond aunt of turning her niece out of doors. Let us hasten to add, in justice to Lady Jane, that she was quite unconscious of this string of motives ; and indeed, if we once begin prying either into our own or into other people’s motives, we are likely to waste much time and gain little satisfaction. Hope did nothing of the kind. She was too much pleased with the result to care whether its causes were simple or complex, and the very same evening she wrote to Mills to ask for the accommodation that she required.

By return of post Mills expressed in glowing language her pride at having been selected to take charge of her young mistress, her delight at the thought of the meeting which was now so near, and her fears lest a first floor in Henrietta Street, Cavendish Square, should seem terribly restricted in point of size and mean in point of furniture by comparison with the space and magnificence of Helston Abbey. She further intimated her surprise that the family should have decided to send Miss Hope to lodgings, seeing that the house in Eaton Square was standing empty, and that a few servants could very well have been spared 'to make you comfortable, the same as your poor, dear Papa would have wished.' She added, however, that it was not for her to complain of the arrangement that had been made. 'And if your own flesh and blood don't know your value, my dear, your old nurse does. So please tell her ladyship, with my respectful duty, that you will be took as much care of here as if you was at home.'

Evidently Mills was one of those ill-con-

ditioned persons, mentioned by Lady Jane, who would be sure to accuse Hope's relations of wishing to get rid of her. It did not, therefore, seem advisable to show her ladyship the whole of Mills' letter, although the above message was duly delivered and graciously received.

Lady Jane, indeed, appeared determined to be gracious. During the last week of her stay at Helston, Hope was troubled with no more remonstrances, and only had to listen to a good many homilies touching the conduct which it would behove her to adopt in London. She might, of course, call upon such of her friends as happened to be in town; but it would be better that she should not do so too frequently, and on no account whatever was she to form fresh acquaintances. It was taken for granted that her absence would only be temporary and that she would be back before the end of the year, which impression she wisely did not attempt to correct. 'I will certainly be with you at Christmas,' she said, not adding that she proposed to allow

herself no more than a fortnight's holiday at that time.

Nevertheless, she was unable to avoid a dispute with her uncle about money, her intention being to live upon the 250*l.* a year provided for her, which Mr. Lefroy declared to be preposterous and impossible. Her knowledge of the subject was so limited that she was easily put to silence, and in the end had to accept, with a mental reservation, the additional sum stated to be absolutely necessary for her support during the next three months.

‘I wish there was no such thing as money in the world!’ she exclaimed impatiently at last; and perhaps there was some truth in the remark made by Mr. Lefroy to his wife, as they stood watching the carriage which bore Hope away to the station :

‘My dear, I am quite ready to admit that you are generally right, while I am generally wrong; but to all rules there are exceptions and I can’t help thinking that you have made a little mistake in allowing that girl to get her

head up. I shouldn't be surprised if she broke clean away from you, after this.'

But Lady Jane said: 'Montague, you do not understand girls. She will come back in a very different frame of mind, and before this time next year she will be married to Dick Herbert.'

'Will she indeed? When that event comes off I shall be more than ever convinced that you are a very superior woman.'

'I hope you will. In the meantime be thankful that you can now ask as many men as you wish down to shoot your pheasants.'

Whereupon Mr. Lefroy, who knew very well that the men who would be asked to shoot his pheasants would not be men of his choosing, smiled, and returned to his study.

CHAPTER VI.

TRISTRAM, R.A.

THERE are more quiet houses in London than is, perhaps, generally supposed ; and probably there would be more still if the majority of people did not secretly enjoy the din of which they so often complain. Such houses must, however, of course, be situated in a *cul-de-sac*, and this is apt to make them as dreary to those who like looking out of the window as they are delightful to persons of a studious turn or nervous temperament. The noise of the traffic comes to them from afar in a subdued, continuous roar, like the breaking of the sea upon a shingly beach ; organ-grinders and costermongers shun them ; often they have gardens attached to them—some-what grimy ones, it is true, still gardens ; and

the owner of one of these is to be seen by his neighbours on most summer evenings, pacing up and down, his pipe in his mouth, his soft felt hat on the back of his head, and his hands in the pockets of his shabby shooting-coat, until the darkness hides him.

The neighbours, peering inquisitively down at this tall, solitary figure, are wont to wonder what he is thinking about, and no doubt their inability to satisfy their curiosity saves them from disappointment; for, like the rest of the world, Wilfrid Tristram, R.A., frequently thinks about nothing worth mentioning. Yet, being, as he unquestionably is, a man of great and original genius, it is only natural that he should be an object of interest to those who dwell around him. He is famous, he is odd, and he is reported to be wealthy. His house, which was built from his own designs about ten years ago, and which stands in a short street not far from Rutland Gate, is as original as its master and by no means as shabby as his coat. Constructed by an artist for an artist, it would be unfit for any other occupant, and unless

Tristram leaves it to an artist at his death it will have to be pulled down. It possesses an entrance-hall of noble dimensions, a vast and admirably lighted studio, a good-sized dining-room, a small smoking-room, and no drawing-room at all. There is said to be accommodation for one or two visitors upstairs; but as Tristram never has a visitor to stay with him this is space thrown away.

Friends, however, he has, and plenty of them. It is probably for their sake that he keeps an excellent cook, he himself being utterly indifferent as to what he eats and drinks. His dinner-parties, which occur on an average twice a week during the season, and to which only men are invited, are popular. There is no formality about them; a large proportion of those who attend them have achieved distinction in some way; they are enlivened by a good deal of merriment, and the company seldom separates until the night is far advanced. The host, when in the humour, can be as gay as the youngest of his guests and will even indulge in a little horse-

play upon occasion ; but it is doubtful whether he does not prefer his own society to that of anybody else. There are men who, by nature, or by the force of circumstances, are doomed to be always alone, and such men are probably never more alone than when they are surrounded by companions. Tristram's history—or, if not his history, some approximate version of it which did as well—was known to his friends, and was considered by them to explain some of his peculiarities. Many years back, his wife, to whom he was said to have been passionately attached, had left him for the sake of a good-looking young fool, by whom she, in her turn, had been speedily deserted ; and this was held to account for Tristram's dislike of women and for the roughness of his manner towards them, as to which many anecdotes were current.

‘If you want to see my pictures,’ he said once, knitting his shaggy brows and glaring at a great lady who had sailed into his studio, ‘you can go to the private view at the Academy ; if you want to buy them, you can com-

municate with me by letter ; but if you only want to talk, I must ask you to repeat your visit some day when there is no light and when I can't work.'

Yet there were a few ladies—the heroine of this story, amongst others—whom he did not hate. He admitted that good women, though rare, were to be met with occasionally ; good men he believed to be, upon the whole (and if you did not fix your standard too high), more common than bad ones. What he could not and would not admit was the existence of a single capable art-critic. For many years the critics had ignored or laughed at him ; they had caused him an amount of suffering which would have astonished them very much had they known of it, and he was quite unable to forgive them now that they lauded him to the skies. It was against the critics that Hope used to hear him thundering in the days when her father used to take her to Tristram's studio. He would not even have their praise, which he averred to be as stupid as their blame. One of them, and one only, had had

the luck to win a good word from him by declaring that it was 'impossible to judge Mr. Tristram's works by any of the received canons of Art.'

'Here,' cried Tristram, when he read the above passage, 'is a fellow who deserves to be better employed! He has found out that there are forest trees which his little arms can't span nor his puny strength cut down, and in a moment of honesty he actually says so! There is hope for that man.' And he incontinently asked the critic to dinner, but was disappointed with him on closer acquaintance, finding him less humble than might have been anticipated.

Humility was a virtue which Tristram felt to be more becoming in others than in himself. He could not help knowing that he was a great man; it was a pity that he could not help the littlenesses from which even great men are not always exempt. Confident in his own genius, but so sensitive to a breath of censure that the reading of the newspapers at certain seasons of the year was a daily penance to him, he made himself miserable

over attacks at which other artists would have been content to smile, and it was always in the power of the merest criticaster to goad him into a fury.

However, not many people attacked him after his reputation was once made; and it must be said for him that his wrath, even against the critics, did not go beyond words. Had one of them been reduced to poverty and come to beg for his assistance, it is certain that five pounds would have found their way out of Tristram's pocket into his before he had been narrating his woes for five minutes. Persons in need of five pounds, and of greater as well as less sums, frequently visited Tristram, got what they wanted, and, as the lamentable practice of such persons is, returned a second and a third time. 'The greatest painter of the century,' as they were too apt to denominate him in their gratitude, opened his hands to them without stint and without putting many questions. He had known what it was to be poor and hungry, and had no desire that others should experience those sad sensations, if he

could help it. True, he had never begged—would probably have starved rather than beg—but that was because he happened to respect himself. He did not expect everybody to possess self-respect or demand too much of poor human nature. Half child, half philosopher, he scattered abroad the money of which he now had far more than he required, only too glad that it should be picked up by those who cared more about it than he did.

One November morning he was in his studio, dashing off a study for a picture which afterwards became celebrated—the sale of the Roman Empire by the Prætorians to Didius Julianus—when someone was announced whose business was not of that simple kind which is disposed of by the careless gift of a handful of guineas. Tristram, who had not seen Hope since her father's death, and who was far from suspecting what had brought her to his house, dropped his brushes and hurried towards the door to meet her.

‘Ah, my dear Miss Hope!’ he exclaimed, taking both her hands, ‘I don’t know whether

I am most glad to see you or sad to see you alone. Your dear father was a kind friend to me—I think he was kind to everybody. Only he was always so quiet in his ways that perhaps we none of us knew how much we cared for him till we heard that he was gone.’

Tristram was not a reticent man. It would never have occurred to him to pass over his old friend’s death without allusion, or to express his sympathy with the orphan by silence and mournful looks, which is the more common method. He may have been wanting in delicacy ; but Hope, at any rate, did not think so. His simple words went straight to her heart and brought the tears into her eyes.

‘You really knew him,’ she said ; ‘there are so few people who did.’

So they sat down together and talked about bygone days, and Hope was able to speak more freely of her loss than she had as yet spoken to anyone. ‘But I ought not to interrupt you like this, she said at last.

‘You don’t interrupt me,’ answered Tristram, ‘or rather I like being interrupted. But I can go on with my work if it will make you more comfortable.’ And he picked up his pallet and brushes again. ‘What are you doing in London? Are your uncle and aunt up?’ he asked presently.

‘No,’ answered Hope, ‘I am living by myself—at least, I am living with an old nurse of mine—and I called to-day to have a serious consultation with you. You know that I have lost all my money?’

‘Yes, I heard. It made me very sorry.’

‘You ought not to be sorry,’ returned Hope, smiling. ‘Do you remember once saying to me that it was a thousand pities that I was not obliged to earn my own living?’

Tristram stopped painting and looked at her, drawing his brows together.

‘Did I say that?’ he asked.

‘Yes; and the last time I saw you—at that ball, you know—you told me that I ought to be thankful for having a pursuit to fall back upon.’

‘That I do remember ; and I stick to what I said. Well?’

‘Well, now I have fallen back upon my pursuit and I have to work for my living, and I want you to advise me as to the best and quickest way of doing so.’

When Tristram was annoyed or perplexed he had a habit of combing his beard violently with his long fingers. He began combing his beard now. ‘Am I to understand that you are dependent upon your own exertions?’ he asked.

‘Not exactly that, because I have a small income still. I should have thought it would have been enough for me to live upon, but they tell me it isn’t ; and anyhow I should prefer its being larger.’

‘But I heard that your uncle—that you were to continue to live at Helston.’

‘Yes ; but I couldn’t ! I know everybody would say that it was “the proper arrangement,” and I know everybody will be horrified at my wanting to be an artist and lead an independent life ; but you are not like

everybody. I thought you would understand.'

'Oh, I understand well enough,' answered Tristram, who was walking about the room, and was still causing himself much unnecessary pain by dragging hairs out of his beard; 'I understand as well as anybody what the charms of freedom are; but then, my dear Miss Hope, I am a great big man and I have always had to look after myself, while you are a young lady who has been brought up in cotton-wool.'

'A woman may be an artist,' said Hope.

'Oh, certainly; there is Rosa Bonheur, and there was Angelica Kaufmann.'

'There have also been plenty of others. Please don't talk to me as if I were a silly child. I don't aspire to be famous; but surely there is no great presumption in thinking that I may learn to paint pictures which some people will buy. Look at the rubbish that they do buy!'

'Would you be content to paint rubbish? I grant you that rubbish sells more readily

than anything else ; but even that popular article requires to be signed by a well-known name.'

'Everything must have a beginning.'

'Oh, excuse me ; there are many things which had much better not be begun.' He paused abruptly in his walk and planted himself in front of his visitor, with his hand upon his hips. 'Look here, Miss Hope,' said he ; 'did you come to ask me for advice?'

'No,' answered Hope, boldly, 'I didn't ; because my mind is made up. I came to ask you for information and help.'

'Come,' said Tristram, with a laugh, 'I am glad you take up that line ; it relieves me from responsibility. And now, if you will promise not to tell anybody, I'll let you into a secret : I believe that if I had been in your place, I should have done exactly what you are doing.'

Hope's face, which had grown rather grave, lighted up with smiles. 'Oh, thank you !' she exclaimed, gratefully.

'Ah, but that doesn't alter the fact that

you are doing a foolish thing. Now, how am I to help you? Do you want me to introduce you to the picture-dealers?’

‘Of course I don’t; how could you think such a thing of me? I want you to recommend a course of study to me. I am utterly ignorant about masters and schools and so on. The only master I know of is old Mr. Bluett, whom Papa used to have down to Helston to give me lessons.’

‘And who taught you long ago all that he has it in him to teach.’

‘I daresay he did. Where ought I to go now, then?’

Tristram took a few more turns without replying, and then said suddenly: ‘You had better come here, I think.’

‘Here?’ repeated Hope, doubting whether she had heard rightly.

‘Yes, I think so; it isn’t as if you were quite a beginner. If you were, I should hesitate to undertake you, for I have very little patience and no experience as a teacher; but, as it is, I believe I can push you on more

rapidly than you could be pushed on in a School of Art. No doubt you would learn something there; but the process is a slow one, and my object is——'

'But, Mr. Tristram,' interrupted Hope, 'I must not take up your time in that way. It is very good and kind of you to think of it; but I could not accept so much.'

'I never met such an obstinate young lady as you are; you won't accept anything from anybody! Do you suppose I am going to let you interfere with my work, pray? What you are to do is to watch me in the first place, and to work in a corner by yourself in the second. Every now and then I shall take a look at you, and tell you where you are going wrong. What I was saying when you interrupted me was that my object is to be able to let you know as soon as possible whether there is any use in your persevering. Mind you, it isn't worth your while to paint what you call rubbish. You sacrifice a great deal in taking up Art as a profession. You lose sight of your friends, you drop out of society,

you are called eccentric, and you miss opportunities which—which—in short, you leave your own class. If you have any chance of making a name for yourself, well and good. But you must not pay such a long price merely for the satisfaction of pocketing twenty or thirty guineas occasionally.'

'You forget the freedom,' remarked Hope, smiling.

'Oh, freedom!—that's a relative term. After all, what do you want with freedom?—and who is really free to do as he likes? Certainly you are not. Why you can't even come here to study under a grey-beard like me, unless you bring some sort of an old woman with you. I have an aged house-keeper somewhere about the establishment who might do. Or could you get your ex-nurse to look after you?'

'I will ask her,' answered Hope, to whom this aspect of the case had not yet presented itself, and who began to realise the difficulties of independent existence. 'But I am not sure that she can spare the time.'

Mills, however, when informed of the service required of her declared that all her time was at her young mistress' disposal, and that her first-floor lodgers must not expect to have their landlady at their beck and call from morning till night. It was bad enough, she said, that they should be on the first floor at all, while their betters were sent up to poky little rooms over their heads; but if they began to give themselves airs, why, the sooner they moved elsewhere the better.

As they had never given themselves airs this was a little hard upon them; but Mills was not pleased with what she considered Hope's escapade, and, being vexed at things generally, had to find a scapegoat somewhere.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OPINIONS OF MRS. MILLS.

INJUSTICE and misconception are rife in this world, and very good people often judge other good people with conspicuous lack of charity. It is even pretended by some that good people are more prone to err in this way than bad ones; but let that pass. Certain it is that at this time the worthy and faithful Mills formed an exceedingly low opinion of Mr. Montague Lefroy. Miss Hope, poor dear, might think it a fine thing to try and earn her own daily bread; it was natural that she should think so, bless her innocence! But what would her poor papa have said if he could have seen her tramping through the streets in all weathers on her way to the house of a common artist, who was not over and above civil to her when she got there,

and didn't seem to know his proper place at all! And as for that old uncle of hers, who was living in what ought to have been her home, and who should have known a great deal better than to permit such goings-on, Mills became so angry when she thought of his behaviour that she was more than once driven to exclaim 'Drat him!' aloud. However, she only did this in the solitude of her own room. Mills knew her place, if Mr. Tristram did not know his. She might have her own notions of what was right as betwixt relations, of what was due from the younger branch of a family to the elder, likewise of what was commonly decent; but far be it from her to utter them! She was well aware that it was not for her to make remarks about her superiors, and that there might be no mistake as to her submissive attitude, she took care to say as much to Hope every morning of her life.

But neither with her lips nor in her heart did she murmur at the task imposed upon her of spending many a weary hour in the

studio of the common artist above mentioned. She did not like it; she would have preferred to be keeping an eye upon her servants at home; but on the other hand she was proud of acting as Miss Hope's protector, and, having an unfailing supply of socks and stockings to darn, argued philosophically that she might almost as well be darning them in one place as in another.

Tristram, who was a good deal amused by her determined silence and by the grim impassiveness of her demeanour, found her, one day, gazing at a picture which he had just finished and asked her what she thought of it.

'If you please, sir, I'm no judge,' the old woman said.

'That is a very poor reason to give for not pronouncing a judgment. Come, let us hear your opinion.'

'Well, sir, if I'm to say what I think,' replied Mills, who perhaps was not sorry to say what she thought, 'I prefer Miss Hope's pictures to yours.'

‘It would be a very good thing for Miss Hope if half-a-dozen people whom I could name agreed with you and had the courage to say so. Personally, I feel bound to give myself the preference. I think, if you will make a careful comparison, you will see that I have a rather bolder style.’

‘Maybe you have, sir, but it’s too splashy for my taste,’ responded Mills briefly.

‘Mrs. Mills,’ said Tristram, ‘you ought to have been an art-critic. You have laid your finger upon my chief defect, and I daresay it will astonish you to hear that that is the very thing for which I am most admired. Let me tell you, however, that there is no other artist in England who could make such splashes as those.’

In this he spoke the simple truth, and he might have added that there was no artist in England less fitted to instruct a beginner. Tristram’s method was his own, and could hardly be reduced to any set of rules for the guidance of others. Yet he took great pains with his pupil, and though he could not

impart to her the secret of his marvellous dexterity, of the assured sweep of his brush, and of his rapidity of workmanship, he did teach her something.

‘Correctness,’ he told her, ‘is all very well, but it is not Art. What you want to do is to throw your soul into your work and to force people to see with your eyes. Unhappily that is not easy.’

Hope, who had never expected to find it easy, was not discouraged by the very small meed of praise which rewarded her exertions. Tristram would stand with his hands behind his back silently contemplating what she had done, and when asked to point out faults, would reply that there were none to speak of. ‘You haven’t got it yet, that’s all,’ he would say, turning away. He did not explain what he meant by ‘it ;’ but Hope understood well enough.

On one occasion she was privileged to overhear an independent opinion of her performances. As visitors often dropped in during the day, and as Tristram did not think

it desirable that they should be aware of Miss Lefroy's presence, he had made Hope set up her easel in a small room adjoining the studio, the door of which he usually slammed at the first sound of approaching footsteps. One day, however, he happened to push it to without quite closing it, and thus Hope was enabled to hear a voice (which, if she had known it, belonged to a celebrated painter) expressing unbounded admiration of 'The Sale of the Roman Empire.' Tristram responded somewhat gruffly—it has already been said that he was a man whom it was difficult to praise to his satisfaction—and after a time his friend, desisting from eulogy, began to walk about the studio, apparently examining one thing and another.

'This is fine, Tristram,' Hope heard him say presently; 'but it isn't altogether *you*, somehow. I never knew you work up your details so elaborately before.'

'Glad you like it,' replied Tristram; 'it's by a friend of mine, a rising young artist, and you can buy it cheap, if you choose.'

‘Really?’ said the other, who was well-to-do, and who sometimes purchased the works of rising artists, sometimes also disposing of them at a legitimate profit when the said artists had risen. ‘What does he want for it?’

‘Oh, fifty guineas now. Next year it may be a different story; but we mustn’t be too greedy at starting.’

The stranger laughed. ‘I don’t think I’ll buy it,’ he said. ‘If I might offer your young friend a word of advice, it would be to make the most he can of his own powers and not try to imitate the inimitable. He has ruined his picture by putting in those bold touches, which he no doubt takes for a reproduction of your style. I was almost taken in for a moment, but a little closer inspection reveals the sham. Don’t let the poor young man attempt that kind of thing again: it isn’t to be done. There is only one Tristram in the world.’

‘But there are a great many asses,’ returned the ungrateful Tristram. ‘Every one of those bold touches that you mention was

put in by this unworthy hand. Where are you now, my good friend ?'

'It appears to me that I am in the house of a man who has been trying to palm off a fraud upon me,' replied the other good-humouredly. 'Isn't it rather doubtful morality to get a young friend to paint a picture, touch it up yourself, and then ask fifty guineas for it ?'

'That's right ; grumble now ! Why, man, have you no sense of shame ? For that paltry sum I offer you a work which you yourself pronounced very fine so long as you thought that it was by me. When you found that it was neither by me nor by anybody else whom you had ever heard of you began to sneer at it ; and finally, when you are told that I added a stroke to it here and there, you talk about doubtful morality ! Good Lord ! What a world of ignorance and humbug we live in ! Blindfold a man, and it is as much as he can do to distinguish between port and claret ; give him a bottle of your best Chateau Margaux after dinner, and he will go into ecstasies

over it—only if you tell him it is Medoc, he will call it sour. Doubtful morality indeed ! And what sort of morality do you call it, pray, to praise what you don't really like and run down what you are afraid to own that you admire ? Of all kinds of dishonesty, I do think dishonest criticism is the most contemptible, because it is so perfectly safe. Hang me if I believe that such a thing as an honest critic exists !'

He was still fuming after his friend had gone away and when Hope, emerging from her ambush, confessed that she had been playing the eavesdropper.

'Well,' said he, 'I am not sorry that you should have heard what you did. It will show you what Art is as a profession, and the dog's life that we are made to lead sometimes for years. By fools too ; that's the worst of it. The man who has just gone away does at least know something about his trade, and if he can be so blinded by prejudice as to talk the nonsense that he did a few minutes ago, what can you expect from a fellow who only

writes for the newspapers and probably could not paint a cow that anybody would know from a pig, except by the horns?'

'But he did think the picture good at first,' observed Hope, alluding to the artist, not to the critic.

'Did he? Goodness knows what he thought; evidently he himself didn't. He said it was "fine." It isn't fine; he could hardly have said anything more absurd. And he couldn't recognise my touch either when he saw it. Ah, well! in future, when I want a candid judgment on my work, I shall apply to Mrs. Mills. Yours is an uncorrupted mind, Mrs. Mills; you don't deceive either yourself or others.'

'I trust not, sir,' replied Mills. 'And, if you please, Miss Hope, it's past one o'clock.'

Hope, as she walked away, was by no means so displeased with her unknown critic as Tristram had been. Secretly she was inclined to agree with him that the picture had been spoilt by those bold touches which she had not added to it. Tristram had spoken of fifty guineas, too,

and had said that next year the price might be higher. That sounded promising. She had not altogether realised the meaning of his friend's laugh, and she was already beginning to realise the value of fifty guineas. That is a lesson quickly learnt by such as attempt to live upon 250*l.* a year, and Hope was resolved that her annual expenditure should not exceed that modest figure. She had gone into the matter in a thoroughly businesslike spirit, and after setting aside fifty pounds a year for dress (for she could not conceive that any human being could be decently clothed upon less) had found that her rent and household bills averaged four pounds a week. Fifty-two multiplied by four gave two hundred and eight, or an annual deficit of eight pounds, which was a pity ; but by spending a few weeks at Helston during the summer some further retrenchment would doubtless be achieved. Obviously, however, the budget could not be framed so as to include any estimate for cab-hire ; and thus Miss Lefroy, accompanied by Mills, had to walk across Hyde Park twice every day.

Hyde Park on a damp November afternoon is not the gayest place in the world, nor are its footpaths always found pleasant walking by those foolish pedestrians who will insist upon wearing patent-leather boots in London, no matter what the season of the year may be. But when one has the credit of one's battalion to keep up in the matter of dress one must not mind small discomforts, and the dapper young gentleman who stepped out of the mist to meet Hope and her protectress as they hurried homewards, had turned up his trousers and was picking his way along as cheerfully as could be expected under the muddy circumstances. But when he recognised the figure in deep mourning before him his cheerfulness increased into joy; he pitched away his cigarette, took off his hat, and exclaimed: 'Good gracious! Miss Lefroy—how delighted I am! I didn't know you were in London.'

Hope bowed, colouring slightly, and for the first time in her life feeling shy; and the young man added, with a rather crestfallen

air : ‘ You have forgotten all about me, I see. If there is a thing that fills me with grief and humiliation, it is having to tell people who I am ; but there’s no help for it, evidently, this time. My name is Cunningham. Now, don’t say you never heard it before.’

There was not much danger of her saying that ; nor had she ever forgotten the fascinating partner with whom she had once spent a happy evening and against whom she had been warned on the following day. Only he seemed to her to belong to some previous state of existence ; his name was written in a concluded chapter ; the change in her circumstances, she thought, had opened an impassable gulf between her and the world to which she belonged by birth ; and this—or some other reason which she did not specify to herself—made her feel embarrassed ; so that she could find nothing to say, except : ‘ Oh, I remember you quite well, Captain Cunningham.’

‘ Are you going to be any time in London ? ’ he asked. ‘ Where are you staying ? May I call upon you ? ’

‘Well, no ; I am afraid you can’t do that,’ answered Hope, recovering her self-possession, ‘because I am living all by myself.’

Then, as he looked much astonished, she explained : ‘That is, I am living with my old nurse. I don’t know whether—perhaps you have heard of my—my—misfortunes.’

The young man, assuming a decently lugubrious expression of countenance, replied that he had, adding something about ‘awfully sorry—very shocking,’—and so lapsing into unintelligible murmurings.

‘I am studying Art,’ Hope continued ; ‘I hope to be able to support myself in that way some day or other.’

She was moving on now and Cunningham was walking beside her, Mills having dropped into the background.

‘Support yourself?’ repeated the young man in a tone of astonishment amounting almost to stupefaction. ‘I—I—never heard of such a thing!’

‘It is my own choice,’ said Hope, smiling at his consternation and guessing what his

thoughts were. ‘My uncle and aunt wanted me to stay on with them at Helston; but I did not wish to do that. I felt that I must earn my own living. Don’t you understand?’ she asked with a touch of impatience; for the young fellow was staring at her in undisguised surprise.

‘Oh, yes,’ he answered slowly, ‘I understand—only I don’t sympathise. It is the sort of thing that you would be sure to do, and I admire you for it. All the more because it is the sort of thing that I should be sure *not* to do.’

‘Would you not rather feel that you were living by the work of your own hands, than upon an allowance made you by an uncle?’

‘I shouldn’t advise any uncle of mine to offer me an allowance unless he meant his offer to be jumped at. No, Miss Lefroy; it is my fixed principle never to do anything for myself so long as I can get somebody else to do it for me.’

After making this scandalous confession, of which he did not appear to be in the least

ashamed, Captain Cunningham walked on in silence for a few seconds. 'I should like awfully to see your pictures,' he remarked presently. 'Couldn't I manage to get a look at them somehow?'

'Not just at present,' answered Hope, sedately. 'When I have painted a sufficient number, I shall exhibit them in a gallery in Bond Street, and you will be admitted with the rest of the public, upon payment of a shilling. But it seems possible that you may have to wait a year or two.'

'And am I to wait a year or two before I see you again?'

This was a question to which Hope was not prepared to give a reply; but it struck her all of a sudden that the present interview had lasted long enough; so she came to a standstill, and said: 'I don't know. At any rate, I will not take you farther out of your way now.'

Captain Cunningham looked very unwilling to accept his dismissal.

'Of course, if you tell me to go, I must go,'

he said, throwing a reproachful expression into those dark blue eyes of his; 'but, Miss Lefroy, do you never go anywhere where—where—your friends are likely to meet you?'

'Never.'

'I suppose you go home sometimes—to your uncle's, I mean?'

'Oh, yes; I shall be going down there at Christmas.'

'Come, that's better!' cried the young man, cheerfully. 'I'll get them to ask me down too.' And after shaking hands with somewhat unnecessary warmth he departed.

As soon as he was out of hearing, Mills, whose face was bright with pleasure and excitement, and who during the above colloquy had found time to construct a complete romance, exclaimed: 'My dear, what a beautiful young gentleman!'

Hope laughed. 'He is a nice sort of boy,' she said; 'I don't think he is particularly beautiful.'

Nevertheless, she did think so, and indeed could hardly have thought anything else.

Also she had a suspicion that he admired her very much, and his admiration was not altogether disagreeable to her. Is there any woman living to whom the admiration of a beautiful young gentleman would be disagreeable? Hope was very far from setting possibilities before herself in the uncompromising fashion adopted by Mills; but more than once in the course of the next few days she found herself wondering when and where she would next meet Captain Cunningham, and by what means he proposed to get himself invited to Helston Abbey.

It was not by such mere details that Captain Cunningham was likely to be baffled. His acquaintance with Mr. Lefroy and Lady Jane was only a slight one, it was true; but if he did not know them very well, he knew numbers of people with whom they were intimate, and his experience had taught him that an invitation to a country house may easily be obtained in many ways by a resolute man. He had, however, a conscience; which conscience told him that he ought not to seek

for this particular invitation. The fact that he had fallen profoundly in love with Hope Lefroy (he had been profoundly in love once or twice before) did not, he felt, justify him in pursuing her. He had no money worth mentioning, and it appeared that she was now in the same undesirable predicament. Conscience, therefore—or was it prudence, perhaps?—waved him imperatively away from her. In this strait he followed the dictates of his nature and confided his trouble to a certain lady friend of his, whose advice was prompt and unhesitating :

‘ You will please not to make a fool of yourself,’ this worldly-wise lady said ; ‘ and, as I can’t trust you out of my sight, I will take very good care that you spend your Christmas with us.’

It is thus that worldly-wise ladies often succeed in preparing the way for all kinds of catastrophes.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. HERBERT ON MARRIAGE.

MAN is born to labour and sorrow, as the sparks fly upward. The majority of us have so many serious troubles and anxieties that we accept the minor miseries of suppressed gout, unpaid bills, tedious acquaintances, corns and the like, as incidental to our mortal lot, and have neither time nor disposition to grumble at them. But when a man has everything in the world to make him happy ; when he is healthy and wealthy, and has a modest conviction that he is also wise ; when his eldest daughter is about to be married to an altogether unexceptionable viscount ; when his yearly bills are all made beautiful by receipt-stamps, and when he has not so much as a corn to complain of, it is but natural that

he should resent very deeply any trifling worry that may intrude upon his bliss, and think it hard that he should be afflicted with a wrong-headed niece.

This is why Mr. Lefroy, after welcoming Hope back to Helston with appropriate Christmas greetings, hastened to promote the merriment of the season by adding emphatically: 'And now I do trust that we have heard the last of this nonsense!'

Hope wished to know what nonsense.

'Why this picture-painting and starving in frowsy London lodgings.'

'Indeed they are not frowsy,' said Hope.

'Very well, they are not frowsy; but they are lodgings and you starved in them. Don't say you didn't, because I know better. You have actually paid back to my bankers the wretched little sum I gave you before you left us. Now I must say I think that is rather too bad!'

'Please don't be angry, Uncle Montague; it is only that I do want to live upon my own resources, if I can.'

‘My dear, I am not the least angry ; but I am bothered, and I can’t for the life of me see why you should wish to bother me in this way. Do you think it is pleasant to be asked by every single person who comes to the house what my niece is doing, and to be obliged to reply : “ Oh, she is up in London, trying to keep body and soul together by painting pictures ? ” I put it to you as a sensible girl—*do* you think it is pleasant ? ’

‘Is that the answer that you make, Uncle Montague ? ’

‘No ; but it’s what they understand. And then they say “ Poor girl ! ” and look pensive. You must admit that this is a little trying to a well-meaning uncle, who only asks to be allowed to do his duty.’

‘There is a well-meaning niece in the case who wants to be allowed to do hers,’ observed Hope.

She was not going to give in ; but she perceived that there were breakers ahead, and it was fortunate for her that her aunt and cousins were just now fully occupied

with Alice's engagement and approaching marriage to Lord Middleborough. The bride-elect, to whose lot had fallen the rare privilege of pleasing her family and consulting her own inclinations at one and the same time, was in an excusable condition of glee, and could hardly be expected to interest herself much at such a moment in her cousin's artistic career, which, indeed, neither she nor her sister had ever taken quite seriously. When, in the midst of a grave discussion as to the colours to be worn by the bridesmaids at the coming nuptials, Alice interrupted herself to remark: 'Of course you will come with us to London in February, Hope?' and when Hope replied that she intended to return to London long before the date mentioned, both the girls laughed, assuring her that she could not do such a thing as that. The doctor having prescribed a total change of surroundings for her, there had been a reason to give for her leaving Helston in the autumn; but she was well again now, and it would never do for her to be living in

Henrietta Street while her relations were in Eaton Square. People would think it so odd.

‘Does it matter what people think?’ Hope asked.

To which absurd question her cousins replied wonderingly : ‘Of course it does, dear—it’s the one thing that *does* matter.’

The proposition was to them so self-evident that they were unable to understand how so talented a girl as Hope could fail to grasp it ; while she, on her side, found it simply incredible that any human being should shape the course of his or her life in submission to the prejudices of a few careless gossips. The best plan was to say no more about it ; and luckily there were many other subjects to be talked about.

A considerable number of visitors were already in the house, and more were expected. Lord Middleborough, an amiable, unremarkable young man, with large possessions, arrived on Christmas Eve, as did also various members of the Lefroy clan, who had

been wont to consider Helston a dullish house in bygone days, and who appeared to be pleased with the new *régime*; but there was one person who did not come, and Hope could not help wondering why he didn't. She mentioned casually to Gertrude that she had met Captain Cunningham one day in London, and asked whether they had heard anything of him lately. The reply that she received was not wholly satisfactory to her.

‘Oh, no,’ Gertrude answered; ‘we never hear of him when we are in the country, except sometimes from Dick Herbert, who is rather a friend of his. People said at one time that he was going to marry Dick’s sister, who is an heiress. Captain Cunningham is the kind of man who is sure to marry an heiress some day; but I suppose he will put it off as long as he can.’

‘Things are made very hard for the poor heiresses,’ Hope remarked. ‘I am glad I am not one any longer.’

‘Things are much more often made hard for those who are not heiresses,’ rejoined

Gertrude ; and there seemed to be something to be said in support of that view.

But Hope trusted that things were not going to be made hard for her just yet. Her uncle, after his first little querulous outburst, left her in peace ; and her aunt, as she fondly imagined, was too busy with her guests and future son-in-law to think about anybody or anything else. Lady Jane, however, was quite capable of thinking about a good many things simultaneously. She had received a hint from her husband and was by no means so indifferent as she appeared to be.

‘Well,’ she said rather sharply to the doctor, who was invited to dinner on Christmas Day, ‘your prescription has had no effect.’

‘Really, my dear lady,’ replied the man of medicine blandly, ‘I don’t think you ought to say that. Miss Lefroy is looking quite well and strong again.’

‘I don’t speak of her bodily health. She is not cured of her complaint ; and you promised that she should be.’

‘Oh, pardon me, I made no promises. And, if you remember, a year was the period of absence which was found successful in the case that I cited to you.’

‘It is utterly and absolutely impossible for me to send my niece away for a year,’ returned Lady Jane pettishly.

‘Then neither my prescription nor I must be blamed if the patient has a relapse. Seriously, I don’t see how you can have expected her to become discouraged so soon. A month or two at sea may be enough to cure a lad of wishing to be a sailor; but a month or two in comfortable quarters in London is hardly enough to cure a young lady of aspiring to be an artist. You should have given her time to fail.’

‘But I am not sure that she would have failed. Besides, a girl’s time is really too valuable to be wasted in that way. No; I am much obliged to you, but I shall try another prescription now.’

The doctor smiled. He guessed what the prescription would be, and was not concerned

to dispute its efficacy. Doubtless it would be better for the poor girl to marry than to fail or succeed in her effort to support herself. The only question was whether she would consent to accept a husband of her aunt's choosing.

Lady Jane wrote out her prescription and sent it off the very next morning. It ran as follows :—

‘My dear Dick,—I wish you would run down here for a few days. I say a few days, because I am afraid you will not be persuaded to remain longer ; but I need not tell you how pleased we shall be if you care to stay on. You can hunt three times a week easily from here, and Mr. Lefroy wishes me to add that he has stabling for as many horses as you like to bring. Hope is with us now, and that is one reason why I want you to come : because you seem better able than anyone else to amuse her and draw away her thoughts from her father's death, which she has not yet got over, I fear. I took your advice and let her

go up to London by herself for some time ; but it was a dangerous experiment and I don't think it has succeeded very well. Do let me have a line to say that you will come, and

‘ Believe me,

‘ Always affectionately yours,

‘ JANE LEFROY.’

In due course of time Mr. Herbert telegraphed ‘ All right ; ’ and Lady Jane, who had not been quite sure that her invitation would be accepted, considered this somewhat uncere-
monious reply as a good omen. Perhaps it would be all right, she thought ; after all, why should it not be ? A glow of legitimate pride came over her as she reflected upon the triumph of capturing so confirmed a bachelor as Dick Herbert. ‘ He certainly admired Hope very much when he was here before,’ she said to herself, ‘ and I doubt whether he would come back again if he did not mean something. Oh, what a mercy it will be if he does ! ’

But the vexatious thing about this man was that, although he had an established

character for plain dealing and practised plain speaking to an extent which bordered upon the offensive, it was not always as easy as it ought to have been to discover exactly what he meant. What, for instance, did he mean by such a speech as this?—

‘I’m awfully glad that Alice is making such a good match, and I congratulate you with all my heart, you know; but at the same time I wish you hadn’t asked me to come here until the business was over. It’s enough to give anybody the blues to see poor Middleborough in his present deplorable condition.’

This was about the only remark that he addressed to Lady Jane on the evening of his arrival; and, having made it, he walked away, feigning not to hear her when she called out to him to come back and explain himself. To Hope, however, he deigned to unfold his sentiments at somewhat greater length.

‘I do think,’ he announced to her, ‘that to marry for love is about the most idiotic thing that anybody can do.’

He sank down, as he spoke, upon the sofa

at the end of the long drawing-room where Hope was sitting alone, her hands lying idle in her lap and her eyes fixed pensively upon the betrothed couple, who had withdrawn into a remote corner and were pretending to play chess. She turned, with a look of surprise, to her neighbour.

‘Why is it idiotic?’ she asked. ‘I should have thought there couldn’t be a better reason for marrying.’

‘Oh, I’ve no doubt you would have thought so,’ answered Herbert, a trifle irritably; ‘at your age one does think so. After one has kept one’s eyes open for a considerable number of years one knows better. To begin with, it’s such a one-sided business. Nearly always it is the man who is in love, and if, by any chance, it happens to be the woman, so much the worse for her.’

Hope made no reply, but glanced significantly at her cousin and Lord Middleborough and smiled.

‘Oh, well,’ resumed Herbert, ‘I didn’t say always, I said nearly always. It may happen

that both are in love ; but what then ? What is falling in love ? It's a pleasant sort of experience, taking it altogether, and of course it becomes delightful if your love is returned, or if you fancy that it is returned. But to marry because you are in love is illogical. A man who does that is very apt to wake up some fine morning and find that he has tied himself for life to a vixen or a fool or a flirt.'

'What would you have people marry for, then?' inquired Hope. 'For money?'

'I have known people who have done so and haven't regretted it. At any rate, they have got all that they expected, don't you see? The great thing is to have a clear understanding before you start, and if one of you, or both of you, are in love that's an impossibility.'

'I don't think I should care to have the future put before me in that cut-and-dried way,' said Hope. 'I would rather take my chance of disappointment. If anyone offered to tell me now exactly what prospect I have of becoming an artist I should stop my ears.'

Some day or other I must know the worst or the best ; but I don't want to know yet.'

'Your character seems to be the opposite of mine,' remarked Herbert ; 'I like to face things.'

By-and-by he asked : 'What do your masters say to you ?'

'I have only one master, Mr. Tristram, and he says very little.'

'Oh ; and what does your uncle say ?'

'Nothing encouraging. I am afraid I shall have to fight another battle before I go back to London.'

Herbert stretched out his long legs and looked at his feet. 'I rather think,' said he, deliberately, 'that you will get beaten.'

'If you do think so, it is not very kind to say so,' returned Hope, with a flash of anger in her eyes. 'I have won one battle ; why should I not win another ?'

'Only because in your particular case it is easier to win one victory than two. Why can't you stay here till February, and then go up with the others ?'

‘You know why—and I did not expect you to turn against me,’ answered Hope, still much incensed against her former supporter.

‘Yes,’ said Herbert, with a sigh, ‘I know. But, all the same, I am bound to confess that if I were your uncle I should not let you leave Helston again. People are sure to talk. In fact, they have begun talking already.’

‘I thought you didn’t care what people said?’

‘We all care really. We may pretend that we don’t; but we do. Young Cunningham told me the other day that he had met you in Hyde Park and that you were living in lodgings somewhere all by yourself, and he wanted to know the meaning of it. I daresay he has been asking everybody.’

‘I don’t see why there need be any mystery about the matter,’ answered Hope; ‘it isn’t disgraceful.’ She hesitated for a moment before adding: ‘Do you know Captain Cunningham well?’

‘Yes; about as well as one knows a man

with whom one has nothing much in common. Why do you ask?'

He opened his eyes a hair's-breadth wider than usual and fixed them upon his questioner, who, to her annoyance, felt herself colouring slightly.

'I don't know,' she replied. 'The girls told me that he was a friend of yours, and I wondered whether it could be true. As you say, you and he are—are—not at all like one another.'

'He is a very pleasant sort of a fellow,' said Herbert, briefly. He looked as if he were going to add something, but apparently thought better of it, and, having already talked a great deal more than he was wont to do in one evening, relapsed into silence.

It is proverbial that silence is often eloquent, and likewise that there are persons who sometimes shine by their absence. If Captain Cunningham had desired to be as much in Miss Lefroy's thoughts as she was in his own at this time, he could not have adopted a wiser course than to deny himself a

visit to Helston Abbey, nor could Fortune have served him better than by sending thither a friend of his who never spoke ill of the absent, and who, when he could not say much good of them, held his tongue.

CHAPTER IX

AN ALTERNATIVE.

HELSTON ABBEY would accommodate some thirty visitors or more, and indeed had frequently done so in former times. Under the rule of its late owner, as has already been said, the greater part of its bedrooms had remained unoccupied from year's end to year's end ; but now it was beginning to recover its ancient character for hospitality. Not, of course, that a renewal of the revels of a by-gone generation, when guests were considered to be slighting their host if they displayed anything like hurry in their departure, was possible or desired. The present Mr. Lefroy and his wife had always been smart sort of people, mixing in smart society, and their hospitality was of the modern kind. The

friends who partook of their excellent dinners, shot their pheasants, and danced in the picture-gallery, which had been converted into a ball-room, would have been bored, perhaps, if they had been pressed to prolong their visit beyond three days; at any rate they could not have yielded to pressure, because they were always going on somewhere else. Arrivals and departures took place every day; strange faces were forever appearing and disappearing; husbands came without their wives and wives without their husbands, which seemed to Hope an odd thing, and the general effect of it all was to her very fatiguing and bewildering.

She asked her uncle once whether he did not find it so; but he said: 'Oh, no; I'm accustomed to it, you see, and it doesn't go on all the year round. We can put up more lodgers here than we could at Southcote, so I daresay it will come to an end sooner. Besides, I never bother myself. If I don't remember people's names I avoid calling them anything until I find out who they are,

and your aunt tells me if there is something particular that I ought to say to them.'

Mr. Lefroy rather overstated the case against himself. He had a pretty good memory and generally managed to say the right thing to the right person, without being prompted. If he did not put himself much out of the way to entertain his guests, he was always genial and pleasant, and welcomed them as if he were glad to see them—and, for that matter, so he was. He liked society; he liked talking at certain hours of the day; only it made very little difference to him whether the person with whom he was conversing was called Peter or Paul; nor did he, as a rule, notice of what units the crowd around his dinner-table might chance to be composed.

One thing, however, he did end by observing, and that was that while others came and went Dick Herbert remained immovable. This discovery rather pleased him; for he knew very well that Dick Herbert would not stay so long without a

reason, and it was easy to surmise what that reason must be. It would indeed be a good thing if Dick and Hope should take a fancy to one another ; but Mr. Lefroy, who had seen a great deal of the world and whose character had a strong vein of good-humoured cynicism in it, was aware that men frequently take fancies to girls without going the extreme length of proposing to them. Moreover, he suspected that Hope would require to be very decidedly in love with a man indeed before she would consent to marry him. He had the curiosity to watch the pair, and was forced to the conclusion that, although they were constantly together and seemed to enjoy each other's company, they were not as yet lovers. As to Dick one could not speak with any certainty, because he was such an undemonstrative fellow ; but Hope had little power of hiding her feelings, and her feeling for this very worthy gentleman and large landed proprietor was too evidently one of friendship only.

‘Nothing will come of it,’ Mr. Lefroy said

to himself, and sighed ; for it would have been most convenient in every way if something could have been made to come of it.

Lady Jane was far from sharing his despondent view. She was too busy to pay attention to details ; the fact that Dick Herbert had stayed a whole fortnight in the house was sufficient for her, and when she had time to think about her niece at all, she thought of her with fond affection. The dear girl had seemed disposed to be odd and troublesome at first ; but she was clearly bent upon doing the right thing now, and her aunt's blessing awaited her. She had only to come and ask for it, coupling with her request that announcement which Lady Jane conceived that she had now every right to expect.

All the more profound, therefore, were her ladyship's disgust and disappointment when, one evening towards the middle of January, Hope followed her into her bedroom, after the party had broken up for the night, to say—not that she was engaged to

Mr. Herbert, but that she proposed returning to London forthwith.

‘I wish,’ Lady Jane exclaimed somewhat sharply, ‘that you would not talk such absurd nonsense! You will go to London with us next month; but sooner than that you cannot go. I thought your uncle had explained it all to you.’

‘It is very kind of you to wish to keep me, Aunt Jane,’ answered the girl, preserving an appearance of calmness, though she was inwardly a good deal alarmed; ‘but I ought not to waste any more time. I really must go to-morrow or the day after.’

‘My dear, “must” is hardly a proper word for you to use. It is an ugly word, and I would much rather not use it myself; I prefer to ask you why you are so anxious to leave us all of a sudden. It seemed to me that you were enjoying yourself here. Has anything occurred to—distress you?’

Lady Jane was not going to make the mistake of mentioning Dick Herbert’s name; but she thought that if there had been a

lovers' quarrel she had better find out about it, with a view to effecting a reconciliation.

But Hope was apparently unconscious of her meaning. 'I have no reason except the old one,' she answered: 'I want to get on with my work, and I want to earn my daily bread as soon as I can.'

'Really, Hope, you have no business to say such things, and I sincerely trust that you don't say them to other people. There is not, and there never was or will be, any question of your earning your daily bread. I don't for a moment suppose that you could do it, if you tried; but your uncle will certainly not allow you to try. I think you are apt to forget that he is your guardian.'

Hope did not forget it at all; nor did she forget who ruled her guardian. She sank on her knees beside the arm-chair in which Lady Jane was sitting, and pleaded, as eloquently as she knew how, to be permitted to have her own way in this thing. She believed that she had some talent for painting, she said; if she had not, Mr. Tristram would soon tell her,

and then she would promise to give up all thought of becoming an artist. Only let her have a few more months of probation; that was all she asked. She was convinced that if her father were alive he would approve of her intentions; and surely Uncle Montague might be brought to consent!

She was very much in earnest; her pleading was pretty and pathetic; and Lady Jane, who was not more hard-hearted than another, was touched by it. But one must not neglect one's duty because one is touched, and everybody knows that good-natured weakness is often more cruel than severity. For these reasons Lady Jane straightened herself in her chair, knitted her brows, put up her eyeglasses, and said: 'Hope, do you know what is your greatest fault?'

'Yes,' answered Hope; 'it is pride.'

'No, my dear; selfishness. You say "I want this—I want that"; you don't consider what the effect of your following your fancies would be upon others. Why, if your uncle and I allowed you to live apart from us and

paint pictures for a livelihood, as though you were a pauper——’

‘I am a pauper,’ interjected Hope.

‘That is not the question ; and please allow me to finish. I say that if we did that, we should be simply execrated ! Even as it is, disagreeable things have been said. That horrid old Lady Chatterton has gone about telling everybody that I won’t have you in the house because you are prettier than Gertrude. I do think it is hard upon me !’

‘But, Aunt Jane, nobody would believe such falsehoods.’

‘That is exactly where you are mistaken, my dear ; everybody believes falsehoods.’

And from that startling position Lady Jane declined to be drawn. Hope exhausted argument and entreaty in vain. Her aunt listened to her, but was always ready with the same conclusive reply. What she asked for could not be given to her. Her request was unreasonable ; but even if it had been reasonable, that would have made no difference : the one important thing was that Lady

Chatterton should not be given an excuse for being ill-natured. She closed the interview by saying: 'Believe me, my dear, there is no cure but marriage for girls who are bitten with a longing for independence. Marriage does not make them independent; but if they have good husbands, they learn to be content with dependency.'

Hope went away defeated and dejected, and from that evening she began to look forward to the future with less confident eyes. She might think that her aunt was at least as selfish as she was; but she was obliged to admit that an impartial person would probably pronounce her aunt to be in the right. Mr. Herbert was an impartial person, and she could get no comfort out of him. When she told him of her troubles and fears, he looked distressed, but did not seem to think that there was anything for it but submission. More than once she said to herself that it might be better, after all, to give up crying for the moon. Her lot was the common lot, and how was she to escape from it if nobody

would back her up? To live on at Helston all her days would be intolerable; but there always remained the alternative of the good husband. A good husband, she supposed, meant a rich husband. Johnson's dictionary defines 'good' as 'fit; proper; convenient'—a definition which would doubtless be concurred in by Lady Jane. Love, fancy, ambition—all these things are very well for such as can afford to indulge in them; but they are not fit, proper, or convenient for young ladies of limited income. Life is hard; life is practical; 'most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly'; and nothing signifies very much, except that one should cease to be a burden upon one's relations and that the mouth of Lady Chatterton should be stopped.

This gloomy survey of existence was encouraged by many little unintentional slights, by continual unavoidable reminders of the changed orders of things, by a sense of utter loneliness for which nobody was to blame. It may even be that a few careless words, over-

heard one evening at the dinner-table, had something to do with it.

‘So little Mrs. Pierpoint has established herself at Melton this year, I hear,’ somebody said. ‘Pierpoint’s abroad—gone away for his health.’

‘Leaving Bertie Cunningham in charge, eh?’ said somebody else, with a laugh.

‘Well, he is riding Pierpoint’s horses, anyhow. How far he replaces him in other ways I don’t know.’

‘The woman is old enough to be his mother,’ remarked a third.

‘Oh, not quite that. And she has a long string of hunters. I daresay Bertie gets a holiday every now and then and consoles himself.’

Now, the doings of Captain Cunningham and little Mrs. Pierpoint, whoever she might be, could, of course, be no concern of Miss Lefroy’s; only when one has allowed oneself to feel a certain interest in and regard for an individual, it is dispiriting to learn that he is an entirely worthless person, and if one

happens to be young and impatient one is apt to be led by such discoveries into judging a whole class from a single specimen. So Hope thought that she was making acquaintance with the world, and that the world, taking it as a whole, was a poor sort of place. It is not at the age of nineteen that one can admit the existence of intermediate shades between black and white.

In the course of a few days it came to pass that Mr. Lefroy gave a great hunt-breakfast. He himself was no longer a hunting-man, but most of his guests were; besides many people may be invited to such entertainments to whom it is difficult to show civility in any other way. Therefore the county at large was asked, and responded with alacrity. The celebrated pack assembled on the lawn and was admired from the windows; and the Master of the Hounds made himself agreeable to Hope by saying cheerily: ‘Well, Miss Lefroy, this is more like; isn’t it? I never expected to see such a lot of pink coats inside Helston. And,

pray, why haven't you got your riding-habit on?'

Hope had not put on her riding-habit because she was not going to hunt; and she was not going to hunt for reasons which the worthy M.F.H. might have divined, if he had not been just a little bit dense. In old days hunting, or at least riding to the meet and seeing something of the hunt, had been one of her chief pleasures during the winter months; but then in the old days her father had been with her, and she had had horses of her own. She had, indeed, horses of her own still; only she did not choose to consider them so. Perhaps her uncle was justified in thinking this perverse and silly of her, and perhaps her cousins had a right to express their annoyance with her for preferring to stay at home when everybody else was going to the covert-side. Lady Jane said nothing, but Lady Jane happened to know that her niece was not going to stay at home.

The hounds and hunt-servants had moved away; the field had followed, and Hope was

standing at the window, watching, rather disconsolately, the last of the carriages as it disappeared round the bend of the drive, when a voice behind her remarked : 'I suppose we might as well be starting now, might we not ?'

Hope turned round and saw, to her surprise, Mr. Herbert, in his ordinary dress, standing at her elbow. 'You here!' she exclaimed. 'Aren't you going to hunt?'

'No ; going to drive you in a pony-trap,' he replied, laconically. 'The old lady's orders,' he added, by way of explanation.

'Do you mean to say that Aunt Jane asked you to take me?' cried Hope. 'How nice of her!'

She went away to put on her hat with a more cheerful countenance than she had worn of late. She was glad that she was not to be left behind, and still more glad that anyone should have been considerate enough to understand that she might like to see the meet, though she could not quite bring herself to go thither on horseback, as of old. 'Poor

Aunt Jane!' she mused; 'I suppose she means to be kind.'

Lady Jane undoubtedly meant to be kind; but if Hope had had any suspicion of what her aunt's motives were for depriving Mr. Herbert of a day's hunting, she would have felt less grateful. She was, however, very far from guessing the truth. It had never crossed her mind that Mr. Herbert could be the potential good husband to whom Lady Jane had made allusion. She liked the man, preferring his society to that of anyone else in the house, and believing him to be sincerely her friend; she was always willing to walk or drive with him, and the more so because their intimacy had now reached that pleasant stage at which the making of conversation is no longer necessary, and silence is permissible.

Of this privilege Herbert was accustomed to avail himself extensively. He never opened his lips after Hope had seated herself beside him in the little two-wheeled basket-carriage, but devoted his attention to sending the pony along at a pace rapid enough to enable them

to overtake the rest of the party, who had got a considerable start. Hope, for her part, did not care to talk. She was content to sit still and think her own thoughts, as she was borne past the familiar trees and fields and hedgerows which she loved so much, and which sometimes seemed to her to be stonily indifferent, and sometimes tenderly regretful, according as her own mood might chance to be. It was one of those still, misty, silver-grey days when all outlines are indistinct and the earth gives out a pleasant, fresh smell, and every twig has its tiny crystal dewdrop. The smoke rose straight from the cottage chimneys, the windmill on the common was motionless, even the jackdaws that lived in the grey church-tower were silent. Hope had an inward greeting for them all. ‘Good-bye, church; good-bye, jackdaws; good-bye, dear old mill!’ She was always saying good-bye to these old friends, though it was likely enough that she would see them many times again. Perhaps it was not so much to them as to her old life that she was bidding fare-

well; to the old life which was slipping away from her—the very memory of it even growing dim—and upon which she was ineffectually trying to keep a lingering hold.

She was sorry when the drive was over, and when she was once more among the spruce, well-turned-out men and women who looked as if they would have been so much more in their proper place in Belgravia than at Helston. But she was not detained long in the company of the dowagers; for Herbert got somebody to open a gate for him and drove her across the grass to the side of the spinney in which the hounds were, and whither the heavier vehicles could not follow. They had not arrived upon the scene a minute too soon: for almost immediately the fox broke cover; the field, a somewhat large one, went streaming away downhill, and the pony, excited by the thunder of hoofs and profiting by the inattention of his driver, plunged suddenly forward and made a bolt for it. However, he was pulled up, after a good deal of bumping and jolting, by the

strong arms of Dick Herbert, who did not appear to think the episode worthy of comment, but only asked: 'Are we to go home now?'

'I suppose so,' Hope answered, rather reluctantly.

'Do you want to go home?' he inquired; and when she said 'No,' he rejoined 'All right, then; we'll make a round. I daresay you know the roads hereabouts well enough to tell me if I go wrong.'

After this he did not speak again for a long time. It was not until they had traversed some miles of road, and the pony had been eased up a hill, that he turned to his companion and said abruptly: 'Well?'

Hope started out of a day-dream and looked up at him, smiling. 'Well?' she returned.

'I mean, how are you getting on? Are you at all more resigned to things than you were?'

'No,' answered Hope, becoming grave again, 'not yet. I feel that there is just the

shadow of a chance that I may be able to talk Uncle Montague over. When that is gone, I daresay I shall realise that what can't be cured must be endured.'

'Oh, *he* won't be talked over,' said Herbert; 'your chance was with Lady Jane, and I'm afraid that is disposed of now.'

'I am afraid so,' assented Hope.

There was a pause of a minute or two, and then Herbert resumed: 'Miss Lefroy, I have a proposition to make to you. I don't know whether it will startle you or not; but there is really no reason why it should. I take it that what you want is to get away from Helston—if possible, by setting up an establishment of your own—but anyhow to get away. Well, as I told you before, the only way in which you can manage that is by marrying somebody; and what I was thinking was, how would it be if you were to marry me?'

This most unexpected proposal, and the perfect composure and slight drawl with which it was enunciated, took Hope so much

aback that she hardly realised the meaning of the words. 'What?' she ejaculated.

'I say, how would it be if you were to marry me? You might just think it over. I wouldn't suggest it if I could see any other way out of the difficulty; but I can't. We have been capital friends from the first; you would be allowed to have your own way pretty well in everything, and I believe I am a very easy sort of fellow to live with. Besides, I daresay I should be a good deal away from home.'

Hope burst out laughing. 'I never heard anything so funny!' she exclaimed. And then, becoming suddenly serious: 'Mr. Herbert, do you really suppose that I should allow you or anybody else to marry me out of charity? I don't quite know whether I ought to be angry or grateful; but I think I am grateful to you. Only, of course, I can't accept your offer.'

'There's no need to be angry, or grateful either,' said Herbert, placidly. 'It's a sort of mutual accommodation business, don't you see? I have always felt that I should have to

marry some day, and if you won't have me, I shall probably fall into the jaws of some London girl who will—well, play the deuce generally. As for you, depend upon it, you won't be able to remain unmarried much longer. You may think you will, just as you thought you might live in a studio in London; but you'll find that circumstances and Lady Jane will be too many for you. And I can't help thinking that you might chance upon a worse husband than I should be.'

'But, Mr. Herbert,' objected Hope, half laughing, and colouring a little, 'I may be old-fashioned—only it does seem to me that there can be no happiness in marriages where there is no love.'

'Yes, I know; but I differ from you there, and you'll allow that I have seen more of the world than you have. There ought to be *liking*, I admit; people ought to be able to get on together when they are married. But you may be furiously in love and yet not get on together a bit—I've seen it scores of times. The fact is that that kind of thing seldom lasts.

After a year or so it is just as if you had never been in love at all; and where are you then, you know? It's a regular cat-and-dog sort of life very often. I give you my word,' he added, with more earnestness, 'that I would never dream of asking you to do this if I didn't believe that it would be for your happiness in the long run.'

Hope made no reply. Should she reject this helping hand that was held out to her or not? A few weeks ago she would have laughed to scorn anyone who should have suggested that she could hesitate in such a case. She, of all people in the world, to make a marriage of convenience! 'A sort of mutual accommodation business'! She would have shuddered at the bare thought. But she did not shudder now. Her eyes had been opened, or she thought that they had; she had lost confidence in herself and in the future. Romance was not for her. It was by no means unlikely that some day circumstances and Lady Jane might, as Herbert predicted, force her into marrying a man for whom she

did not care ; and, as far as mere liking went, she certainly did like her present dispassionate wooer very much.

‘What do you think of it?’ he asked, after giving her plenty of time for reflection.

‘I don’t know,’ she answered, with a deep sigh. ‘Even if I wished to accept, I am not sure that I ought.’

‘Well, don’t accept and don’t refuse; that’s the best way. I’ll tell you what you might do,’ he added presently; ‘you might make it conditional. Suppose you were to go back to London for a time and see whether there is really any chance of your succeeding as an artist? If you find that there is, you can afford to wait until you are of age, and the engagement shall be off; if not, you might take me as a *pis-aller*. I would arrange it all with your people. They won’t like to prevent your going, because I shall explain to them that, if they do, I shall look upon your refusal as final, and not repeat my offer. Do you see?’

Hope began to laugh again, though there

were tears in her eyes. 'Do you know,' she said, looking up at her companion, 'that you are very odd? You seem to be thinking only of me; you don't consider yourself.'

'I beg your pardon; I am considering myself the whole time. I want you to marry me. Indeed, I may say that I want it very much. It appears to me that we are suited to one another in many ways.'

'And are you quite sure that—that you don't expect——'

'Expect you to be in love with me? Certainly not. I know that that is impossible.'

'There is nothing impossible about it,' returned Hope, with a touch of impatience; 'only *it isn't so*. Do you quite understand that it isn't so?'

'Quite, thanks. Now let us talk about something else.'

And during the remainder of the drive they actually did converse much as usual, parting at the hall-door without any further reference to the half-contract into which they had entered.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNKNOWN PATRON.

THE very first thing that Hope did, when she woke up in the morning and recalled the events of the previous day, was to take herself to task for her want of resolution in not having at once and decidedly refused Mr. Herbert. It was true that she had not accepted him ; but she had as good as promised that she would do so, given certain conditions which were by no means unlikely to arise. And of course she could not marry him. She marvelled at herself for having thought for one moment that she could.

This was her first impression ; but, while she was dressing, her mind passed through various other phases. The thought that this engagement—if it could be called an engage-

ment—would enable her to escape, at least for a time, and to return to London, work and liberty, almost made her waver. If she sent Herbert about his business, what would there be to look forward to and to live for? Nothing. But, on the other hand, supposing that Mr. Tristram should tell her that she could never hope to rise above mediocrity in her art? Could she then go back from her word and inform her suitor that, all things considered, she found it impossible to become his wife? Well, if she did, he would not break his heart, she supposed. An odd, and yet not unnatural, feeling of irritation took possession of her when she remembered how cool Herbert had been over it all, and how he had not thought it worth while even to hint that there could be any question of his being in love with her. ‘Am I so very unattractive, then?’ she asked herself.

She was sitting before her looking-glass, which answered her question in language that could not be mistaken. And then, all of a sudden, there flitted before her the vision of a

beautiful youth with dark hair and violet eyes. What made her remember Captain Cunningham at that moment?—and what had he to do with the subject about which she was thinking? These were questions which she would have preferred to shirk; but, under the circumstances, she felt that she must not allow herself to do so. Fortunately for her peace of mind, pride came to the rescue, and enabled her to give Captain Cunningham a contemptuous dismissal. She had only thought of him because he was so good-looking, and because he was a sort of embodiment of youth. If she were ever to fall in love, it might be with somebody like him; but he, as an individual, would certainly never touch her heart. A mere boy—and a very silly and wicked sort of boy, too, by all accounts—no! she was in no danger of cherishing too fond a recollection of him. Mr. Herbert was at any rate a man; in all his words and habits he was thoroughly manly, and no one need ever be ashamed of such a husband. However, he was not to be her husband. She summed up

with that conclusion and resolved that, immediately after breakfast, she would take him aside and let him know of it.

But Fate had decreed that this opportunity of drawing back should be denied to her. Dick Herbert, who was less given to vacillation than she, had formally laid the case before his host on the preceding evening, and thus Hope, instead of taking her suitor aside when breakfast was over, was herself taken aside by Lady Jane and led into Mr. Lefroy's study, where she was embraced and congratulated before she could get her breath.

Lady Jane was radiant. 'My dear, I am so very, very glad! I quite anticipated this, and I am sure we could not wish to see you more happily established. Such a charming place! And although he has not a London house at present, there will be no difficulty about that, so far as money is concerned. Not that money signifies nearly as much as his being such a dear, kind fellow, and so high-principled. Poor Lady Chatterton! She used to try hard to get him for one of her

daughters, and I am afraid she will be inconsolable now.'

'But, Aunt Jane,' interrupted Hope in dismay, 'you talk as if it were all settled, and it isn't settled a bit. I had no idea that Mr. Herbert had spoken to you. Didn't he tell you that there were conditions?'

'Most senseless conditions, in my opinion,' observed Mr. Lefroy, who had seated himself at his writing-table, and who did not seem quite to share his wife's rosy view of the situation.

'Such as they are, Mr. Herbert agreed to them,' returned Hope, fixing bayonets to receive the enemy.

'Yes, yes; we quite understand,' said Lady Jane soothingly, while she patted her niece on the shoulder. 'We may think it rather a pity, but—well, never mind! No doubt all will come right in the end; and if you are so tired of us that you want to go off to-morrow, you can go. We shall not prevent you.'

The fact was that Lady Jane was under

no apprehension of her niece's turning out to be a genius, nor did she fear that, even in that improbable event, there would be any rupture of the engagement; for she was a firm believer in the proverb of *Château qui parle et femme qui écoute*.

‘Well now, you know, Hope,’ said Mr. Lefroy, with his hands in his pockets, ‘all this is great bosh; but as you and Herbert seem to be of one mind about it, I suppose we must give in. I beg, however, to say that we, on our side, have a condition to impose.’

‘A very little one,’ broke in Lady Jane; ‘it is only that you come to us in Eaton Square next month. Now, my dear, we cannot hear any objection to that; we cannot really. You must allow your uncle to be the best judge of what is right and proper for his ward, and I think you will admit that he is stretching a point in letting you leave us at all. As for your living apart from us in London, that is out of the question. It would create a positive scandal, and I am sure you would regret it afterwards as much as we

should. After all, what difference can it make to you? You will go on with your lessons just as before, if you choose, and you will not be interfered with in any way. Well, then that is arranged, and we need not bother your uncle any longer.'

Mr. Lefroy rubbed his hands and looked thankful, and Hope felt that she could not, without extreme ungraciousness, refuse to do as she was told. Nevertheless, she saw that her feet had become entangled in toils from which there might be very great difficulty in extricating them. 'Of course,' she said, turning to her aunt, 'you won't say a word about this to anybody.'

'Really,' answered Lady Jane, 'I don't see why we should make a secret of it. I hate mysteries.'

'But it is not settled!—it is not in the least settled!' cried Hope, vehemently. 'It is only a thing that *may* come to pass some day; and if people are told about it now, it shall never come to pass. Nobody can force me to marry.'

‘Very well, my dear, you need not be so fierce about it. My lips shall be closed until you give me leave to open them. Please remember that poor Mr. Herbert considers himself quite bound to you, that is all.’

‘I don’t wish him to consider himself bound in any way,’ Hope declared; and later in the day she found an opportunity of saying as much to Mr. Herbert himself, who laughed and replied: ‘All right. If I meet with a more suitable person, I won’t fail to let you know.’

‘And I am to be free too,’ insisted Hope.

‘That is of course,’ he answered. ‘I’m sorry you didn’t like my speaking to your uncle. My only reason for doing so was that you wouldn’t have been allowed to go away unless I had.’

This was undeniable, and Hope took some comfort to herself from the thought that she had at least gained a short spell of liberty. Being anxious that it should be no shorter than could be helped, she resolved to take Lady Jane at her word, wrote a hurried note

to Mrs. Mills, spent the afternoon in packing, and came downstairs early the next morning, prepared to catch the first train to London.

She was not suffered to depart without some remonstrance, and there was a good deal of kissing and significant whispering to be gone through in the hall; but fortunately the majority of the guests had not yet left their rooms, so that there were few witnesses of these demonstrations. Herbert's leave-taking was characteristic. He sauntered down the steps as Hope was getting into the carriage and shook hands with her, saying: 'Good-bye, Miss Lefroy, and good luck to you! If you should feel inclined to drop me a line at any time to say how you are getting on, I shall be much honoured. My address is Farndon Court, Windsor. Good-bye!'

And that was the last of Dick Herbert for the present.

Readers of novels are found among all sorts and conditions of men. It must not be suggested that anyone whose eye may chance to fall upon this page can ever have been

let out of prison ; but he may possibly remember to have been liberated from a fine old-fashioned quarantine station ; or he may, years ago, have driven away for the holidays from a private school at which the fare was hard and the discipline vexatious (there are no such schools nowadays, it is said) ; or he may have set foot on shore after eight-and-forty hours of dire sea-sickness. It is at such times that one experiences the rare and delightful sensation of happiness in the present, without thought for the future. Hope's reflections during the whole of her journey to London might have been summarised by a reiterated ejaculation of ' Heaven be praised ! I am out of that.'

She was—if anybody likes to say so—a little ungrateful to people who were doing their very best for her, according to their lights. She was wholly out of sympathy with them ; the restrictions which governed their lives were new and galling to her ; she could do justice to them in theory, but she could not, without misery, dwell with them in her

old home. The little rooms in Henrietta Street were a great deal more like home to her now. It was a joy to her to get back to them, to see Mills' friendly, ugly face again, to sit down to tea and boiled eggs instead of dinner, to have to study economy once more, and to be delivered from the hands of officious maids. Even when she was sitting over the fire late at night and was beginning to take in the fact that to-morrow was at hand, and that to-morrow would be succeeded by twenty-nine other morrows, more or less, after which thralldom must recommence—even then she could not subdue the elasticity of her spirits. If we were all logical and reasonable in youth we might just as well be born old; in which case there would be a sad diminution of the sum of earthly happiness. To Hope at that moment all things seemed possible. Dick Herbert and his whimsical offer were left behind—a long way behind; her own misgivings were shaken off. Why should she not be a second Rosa Bonheur? Great female artists do arise every now and then, and,

according to the law of averages, it was about time for one to make her appearance. That oft-quoted and terribly misunderstood dictum about genius being the capacity for taking infinite pains recurred to her mind and encouraged her; she longed for the morning to come, that she might hasten to Tristram's house and set to work with all the power that she possessed.

The patient Mills was hurried off at an earlier^e hour the next day than was quite compatible with the comfort of her first-floor lodgers; and Tristram, who had been informed by a note of his pupil's return, was waiting in his studio to receive her. 'I am quite well, thank you,' he said, in answer to her inquiries; 'also I am extremely busy, and there is every appearance of our having a yellow fog this afternoon. We will each begin our daily task at once, if you don't mind, and we can talk afterwards.'

'I am quite ready,' replied Hope, entering the little room which was reserved for her

use, and divesting herself of her hat and jacket. 'What shall I do?'

'Do?' Tristram hesitated for a moment, looking about him. He was fond of dogs and always had two or three of them on the premises. 'Here,' he said suddenly, catching up a little Yorkshire terrier by the scruff of his neck and tossing him upon a sofa; 'paint that. You must get it done at one sitting, mind. I don't want a picture or a careful sketch; I want a study, more or less finished. I give you three hours—ample time, if you know how to set about it.' And, with that, he left her.

Hope had not had much experience in depicting animals, nor was she accustomed to work with rapidity; but she determined to do her very utmost to stand the test to which she was being subjected. She was very eager to earn a little praise that morning. If Tristram would only say a few encouraging words it would be such a help to her and would seem like a good omen. So she made friends with the little dog, and induced him to look

at her, and placed him in various positions which he declined to maintain, and 'dashed with feverish haste into her study. It was a total failure, and a second and third attempt pleased her no better; but the fourth time something more like achievement rewarded her efforts.

After the first difficulty had been overcome she took heart and plied her brushes swiftly and silently, while Mills darned an old stocking, murmuring occasionally : 'Poor Toby! Poor little feller!' to the dog, whose name was not Toby, and who glanced over his shoulder with ineffable contempt at the ridiculous old person who knew no better than to call him so. Luckily, he felt an interest in Hope's proceedings, and, when she spoke to him, would rouse himself from incipient slumber to gaze inquisitively at her, with his ears cocked and his head on one side. It was thus that she caught his likeness. His wise little face, his bright eyes, looking out from beneath their shaggy penthouse, the curiosity that was expressed in his pointed

ears, the many shades of his long, silky coat—all these she managed to render with a good deal of skill and fidelity, and she was debating with herself whether she should let well alone or add a few finishing touches, when, to her astonishment, Tristram came in to say that the allotted time was up.

‘So that is my little tyke, is it?’ he observed, examining what she had done, and he stood looking at it in silence for what seemed to Hope an interminable time.

‘Do you think I have improved?’ she ventured to ask at last.

‘Yes,’ he answered slowly; ‘I think you have improved. You have more facility than I gave you credit for—more facility.’

This, coming from Tristram, was a good deal, and he added nothing more, but gazed abstractedly at the study, drawing his fingers through his beard. When he turned away and saw Hope’s happy face, he smiled at her in an odd, rather sad sort of fashion. He looked as if he were sorry for her, and she wondered why.

‘You want to get on very much, don’t you?’ he asked gently.

‘Yes; *very* much!’ she replied.

‘Well, well!’ muttered Tristram, and began to walk up and down the room. Presently he stopped and shook his broad shoulders, as if to free them from a weight. ‘Come,’ said he cheerfully; ‘you have done a good morning’s work, and I have got a little bit of good news for you as a reward. I have sold two of your pictures.’

‘Oh! have you?’ exclaimed Hope, catching her breath.

‘Yes; and got a hundred guineas for the pair, too. What do you think of that?’

A hundred guineas! Hope felt herself rich beyond the dreams of avarice. ‘Is it possible?’ she cried. ‘Who *could* have bought them?’

‘Well, a dealer bought them; but it was on commission, as I need hardly say. His instructions were to buy two of your pictures, and he wanted to know the price. I said a hundred guineas, at which he made an ugly

face ; but he admitted that he was authorised to expend that sum, and I assured him we couldn't take less.'

'Mr. Tristram,' said Hope, becoming grave, as a rather dispiriting thought crossed her mind ; 'upon your honour—was it *you* who bought those pictures?'

'Upon my honour,' answered Tristram, 'it was not. Upon my honour, I don't think them worth the money. And if you don't know who the purchaser is, I'm sure I do not.'

'I haven't an idea,' said Hope musingly.

She had an idea ; but it was an absurd one, and she dismissed it. Young officers in the Guards, with next to no income, do not throw away a hundred guineas upon the daubs of an amateur. Besides, why should Captain Cunningham care to possess any of her productions? She never would have supposed that it could be he, only that she was unable to think of anyone else who knew that she was painting with a view to ultimate profit. Nevertheless, this notion, for all its

absurdity, came back to her more than once in the course of the afternoon and evening ; and she only got rid of it at last by reminding herself that Cunningham was a man whom she could never like, and that, if he bought pictures at all, it was probably to present them to little Mrs. Pierpoint.

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CHAPTER XI.

HOPE IS TOLD THE TRUTH.

IF Hope had felt any overpowering desire to learn the name of the man who had so rashly expended a hundred guineas upon two carefully executed but not very original works of art, she might easily have asked Tristram to give her the address of the picture-dealer and applied to that intermediary for the desired information. This course did, indeed, suggest itself to her ; but, upon second thoughts, she decided not to adopt it. People who insist upon knowing too much often have reason to repent of their curiosity ; and what, after all, did it signify ? The important matter was that she had already managed to earn a round sum of money ; that would be something to tell her uncle when he came up to London.

In the meantime, she took advantage of her leisure to work unremittingly both in Tristram's studio and at home.

Tristram, after the first day, did not praise her much; but, on the other hand, she fancied that he watched her with greater interest and treated her aspirations more seriously than he had done in the autumn. His method with her had the appearance of being a little capricious. He seldom allowed her to finish anything that she had begun, but would push it aside, saying: 'There's enough of that; try something else.' Sometimes he would make one of his models sit to her in an attitude which would have bothered Michelangelo himself; sometimes he would order her to produce an effect of light and shade which even his own audacity might have hesitated to undertake. He never gave her anything easy to do and never seemed to care much about her drawing being defective. By degrees she began to understand what it was that he was trying to discover; and though this made her tremble—for she could

not help knowing that the originality which he sought was not in her—yet her courage rose even while she trembled and while the immense difficulties of art grew more apparent to her. To recognise a difficulty is surely a step, though it be but a small one, towards overcoming it.

The days flew by and Hope's holiday of hard labour seemed scarcely to have begun when it was over. It was, in fact, somewhat curtailed by the arrival of her relations in Eaton Square at a date rather earlier than that which they had fixed upon. Parliament met in the first days of February, and, as an important amendment was moved to the Address, it was necessary that Mr. Lefroy should be in his place to swell the numerically feeble ranks of the Opposition. His voice, likewise, was placed at the service of his party and the country for a few minutes, when he rose, with an amiable smile, to say that the wild inconsistencies of the right honourable gentleman at the head of the Government had now, he should imagine,

reached their culminating point. Further, that he (Mr. Lefroy) happened to know as a fact that a very large section of the right honourable gentleman's followers were aghast—simply aghast—at the condition of public affairs, and would certainly never give him another vote if they had the courage to obey their consciences.

This declaration, which brought about—as it was probably designed to do—a very pretty row at the time, was not productive of serious consequences ; and, so far as any benefit to the Conservative cause was concerned, Mr. Lefroy might, perhaps, as well have remained quietly at Helston Abbey. But his return to London, if it failed to check the headlong career of the Ministry, was quite effectual in disturbing that of his niece. Hope, after she had bidden a regretful farewell to Henrietta Street and had reported herself, in accordance with instructions, in Eaton Square, soon perceived that her studies could only be continued in the face of persistent and almost insurmountable obstacles. Although she was

nominally allowed to take her breakfast at any hour that suited her, she could not practically get it before ten o'clock; and immediately afterwards her cousins were wont to claim her services.

‘You might be good-natured and come to the dressmaker’s with me,’ Alice would say. ‘You have all your life to paint pictures in, and I have only a few weeks in which to provide myself with a stock of decent apparel.’

Lady Jane, too, showed an alarming tendency to assume that all the required concessions had now been made, and that it only remained to summon Mr. Herbert up from the country. When Hope assured her that she was labouring under a total misapprehension of the case, she only smiled indulgently and said: ‘Well, he *must* come up for Alice’s wedding, at any rate, and then you and he can talk matters over. But for your own sake, I hope you won’t go on much longer like this. Everybody is talking about it.’

‘Do you mean to say,’ exclaimed Hope in

dismay, 'that you have told anybody that we are engaged?'

'Certainly not. How could you think such a thing of me after my promise to you? Naturally people noticed that you were always together at Helston, and naturally I have been asked questions about it; but I have always replied that there was no engagement yet.'

'Yet!' Hope groaned and turned away. It was evidently useless to remonstrate with her aunt.

On the third day after her change of quarters a number of people came to dinner, amongst whom was a certain Mr. Francis: 'A great friend of Dick Herbert's,' Lady Jane whispered to her; 'he is going to take you in to dinner, and I hope you will make yourself agreeable to him, because he is by way of being extra fastidious.'

The inference that she was about to be submitted to Mr. Francis for approval was not calculated to prepossess Hope in favour of that gentleman; nor was she particularly taken with the look of him when he was intro-

duced to her. He was a small, wiry, alert man, with bright brown eyes and dark hair and beard, in which last a white thread or two were distinguishable here and there. Hope fancied that he was mentally appraising her, and did not trouble herself to respond to his advances with any cordiality. He was not, however, discouraged by her coldness, and after a time she became interested in him, in spite of herself. He talked very pleasantly; he seemed to know everybody, to have been everywhere, and to have tried his hand at all sorts of occupations and amusements. Before dinner was half over Hope had found out that he had been in Parliament, but had accepted the Chiltern Hundreds, experience having forced him, as he said, to abandon so many of the advanced ideas with which he had started that he had thought it best to retire from political life while he had still a few illusions left. He appeared to know a good deal about art; he had at one time been war correspondent to one of the chief daily papers; he had accompanied a yachting expedition to the

polar regions, and there was no variety of sport with which he was not familiar.

‘It was Dick Herbert who first introduced me to the big game,’ he remarked. ‘You know him, I believe? And I hope you like him; because, if you don’t, we won’t talk about him.’

Hope would much have preferred not to talk about him; but honesty compelled her to admit that she liked him, and her neighbour went on:

‘I shall never be such a shot as Herbert; but I’m respectable enough to be trusted on occasions when it wouldn’t be altogether safe to miss; and he and I have had many a good month together in India and Abyssinia. Dick Herbert is, without any exception, the best-tempered fellow that I know. I never saw him put out, and I never heard him grumble.’

‘I am not sure that I admire that extreme good-nature,’ Hope was provoked into saying. ‘Of course, if one does not care particularly about anything or anybody, one is not likely to be put out.’

Mr. Francis looked annoyed. 'You don't know much of Dick Herbert, evidently,' he remarked.

As he was silent for several minutes after this, Hope flattered herself that she had caused him to drop the subject; but presently he took her terribly aback by turning round in his chair so as to face her, and saying: 'Miss Lefroy, I wish you would tell me something. Perhaps it is rather impertinent of me to ask; but am I right in suspecting that Herbert is going to be married?'

'I—I—don't know,' answered Hope, faintly. But she recovered herself in a minute and added: 'To the best of my belief he is not engaged to anybody.'

'Oh, I see—only going to be. Well, I'm sorry. I hope you will excuse my saying that I'm sorry. I don't speak from a selfish point of view, for I should be glad to see Herbert married, though I suppose I may expect to lose a good friend when the event comes off; but there are very few women good enough for him, and still fewer who would be likely

to suit him. I wonder whether it is too late to try and stop this.'

Hope hardly knew how to answer. As no direct reference had been made to herself, she thought it best to assume that she was not alluded to, and said :

'Not in the least too late, I should think. As I told you, I don't believe Mr. Herbert is engaged at all.'

'Ah, but you think he will be before long, and so does Lady Jane ; she gave me to understand as much. Besides, he wouldn't have stayed all that time at your uncle's without a reason. As a general thing he hates staying in other people's houses, unless it is for a few days' shooting. You are quite mistaken in supposing that Herbert doesn't care about anything or anybody. He cares a good deal more than most people, and shows it a good deal less, that is all. He is the very last man in the world who ought to make such a marriage as I am pretty sure that this would be. His wife must be able to enter into his ways, otherwise she will spoil his life, and

very likely her own into the bargain—if that signifies.’

‘Possibly it might signify to her,’ remarked Hope. ‘Do you mean that she should be able to shoot lions and tigers?’

‘No,’ answered Mr. Francis, rather tartly, ‘I don’t. I mean that she ought to be as unselfish and kindhearted as he is; and, to speak plainly, I doubt whether the lady in question is remarkable for unselfishness.’

‘Are you sure that you know much about her?’ inquired Hope.

‘I am not very well acquainted with her, certainly; but some people are easily classified. No doubt she would turn out a very fair, average empty-headed member of society if she were mated with one of her own species; but most assuredly she is not fit to black Dick Herbert’s boots. I ought to apologise for my plain language; but I hate to think of poor Herbert being so thrown away.’

‘Pray don’t apologise, Mr. Francis,’ said Hope, who was excusably indignant. ‘I dare say it will do me good to have heard what is

the impression that I produce upon a total stranger. But I think you are needlessly alarmed on your friend's account. Both he and I are perfectly free, as it happens, and if you will only repeat some of the amiable things that you have been saying about me to him, no doubt he will give up all idea of throwing himself away upon me.'

Hope was too angry to turn her eyes towards her neighbour. Had she done so, she would have been privileged to behold a man of the world, an ex-Member of Parliament, and an intrepid hunter, looking as great a fool as it is possible for any mortal to look.

'Good gracious!' he exclaimed, in accents of heartfelt distress; 'what a frightful mistake I have made! I never for a moment supposed that you were the lady; I thought, of course, it was your cousin. It was Lady Jane who misled me; she was so oracular about it. I am afraid you will never forgive me, Miss Lefroy.'

Hope could have forgiven him more easily if she could have pardoned herself. How

could she have been so foolish as to let out the very thing that she was most anxious to conceal! How could she have supposed that Mr. Francis, or any other casual acquaintance, would tell her to her face that she was empty-headed and selfish!

‘The best plan is to say no more about it,’ she answered, not over-graciously. ‘It is a great pity that Aunt Jane cannot keep anything to herself. I am sorry you have such a bad opinion of poor Gertrude. But, perhaps, after all, you only meant that you did not wish your friend to marry anybody.’

And then she turned away from him and began to talk to an old gentleman who was seated on the other side of her.

Hope had no further conversation with Mr. Francis that evening; but his words remained in her mind and rankled there. If what he had said applied to Gertrude, it applied with quite equal force to herself; and after everybody had gone away she summoned up all her courage, drew her aunt into one of the empty rooms, and said: ‘Aunt Jane, I

want to tell you that I have quite made up my mind not to marry Mr. Herbert.'

Poor Lady Jane fairly lost patience. 'It appears to me, Hope,' she exclaimed, 'that there is only one thing about which you have made up your mind, and that is to cause as much distress as you can to everybody. I shall not interfere. When Dick Herbert comes you and he must settle it between you. But I must say that for a girl who professes such extreme reluctance to be dependent upon her relations you are singularly unwilling to take an excellent opportunity of relieving them from all responsibility for your vagaries.'

And with that Lady Jane clutched her bedroom candlestick, and marched majestically upstairs.

The good lady—for she was really good and wished no harm to any living creature—was sorry afterwards that she had spoken so sharply; but she did not think it necessary to retract her words, nor, perhaps, even if she had done so, would her niece have been able to forget them.

Early the next day Hope escaped to Tristram's studio. The maid who had been told off to accompany her since her removal to Eaton Square could not be spared that morning, she was informed ; so she broke through regulations for once, and, without saying a word to anybody, went off alone. But when she reached her destination she found that she could do nothing. Her trembling fingers refused to obey her, and presently she sank down upon a chair, saying : ' It is no good ; I am too tired.'

' What is the matter with you ?' asked Tristram, who had stationed himself beside her easel.

Hope was very nearly bursting into tears outright. However, she swallowed down the lump in her throat, and answered : ' Nothing is the matter—at least, everything is the matter. Mr. Tristram, I can't bear it any longer ; I must be put out of my pain. I am sure you can tell me now. Is there any chance ?'

Tristram's long, bony fingers twisted them-

selves into his beard. He gazed at his questioner, and made no articulate reply; but every second of silence was a reply to her, falling like lead upon her heart.

‘No,’ he burst out roughly at last; ‘there is no chance.’ Then he spun round on his heels, walked away to the window, and remained there, looking out at the grey sky and the bare, blackened trees.

Probably there are few people who have not, at one time or another, received some such answer as this. We have waited, perhaps, through long weeks, hoping against hope, for news of the missing ship; we have scanned the doctor’s face, it may be, day after day, not daring to put into words the question that has been trembling upon our lips. And then, all of a sudden, the blow falls. It is an odd sensation, and is seldom what we expected it to be. The worst has happened that can happen. It is all over; the very suffering itself is over, only the memory of it remaining. Whether we know it or not, the recuperative forces of nature set to work instantly to con-

sole us, and what people call despair is very often only another word for peace. The first thing that Hope was conscious of, after a minute of dizziness and bewilderment, was that she was very sorry for the good friend who had been forced to deal so cruelly with her.

‘Never mind,’ she said, ‘you have done your best.’

That great baby Tristram turned to her with his features distorted into a grotesque grimace and tears in his eyes. He began to speak loudly and hurriedly, his words jostling one another. ‘I had to tell you—what could I say? You have not genius, and without genius you cannot—in your position—take up Art as a trade. It was better that you should be told. I know—don’t trouble to explain—I understand it all. You have had a dream, and it can’t come true. Heaven help us! we all have dreams, and all have to wake out of them, some in one way, some in another. What a world we live in!—and what helpless wretches we are! All this be-

cause a man as rich as Cræsus takes it into his head one day to buy a few shares in an infernal unlimited bank ! If anyone wants proof of the intervention of Providence, there it is for him. Don't tell me that these things happen by blind chance. Why they should ever happen at all—but what is the good of talking ? Courage ! courage ! don't let that devil of a thing that they call life beat you. Fight it out. Look at me : I have been through worse trouble than you have known or ever will know, I trust ; and yet here I am, alive and well and happy—yes, happy, in spite of all. I have felt like cutting my throat more than once ; there have been days when I thought I could not hold out any longer, and must knock under. Even when the worst was over, I had to contend against poverty and stupidity and the malevolence of those cursed critics——' He went on confusedly referring to the miseries of his past life, half forgetting his hearer's troubles in the remembrance of his own ; but that he could not help : it was his nature to view the world

and all events that took place therein subjectively.

After a time he recollected himself, grew calmer, and sat down beside the girl, taking both her listless hands in his strong ones. 'Come now, Miss Hope,' he said; 'we must not make a tragedy out of this. We don't know what your life might have been like if you had been able to make what you wished of it; it isn't certain that it would have been happy. I think a man who has creative power, and who feels in him the love of beauty, cannot be miserable; but I don't know about women; their wants are not the same as ours. Just now, what you are thinking of is the irksomeness of having to live with people who don't suit you; but that will not last for ever. Perhaps it may come to an end very soon.'

'Yes, perhaps,' assented Hope. Presently she added: 'Mr. Tristram, will you advise me what to do? You have always been so kind, and I have no one else to consult, except people who can't give an unprejudiced

opinion.' And, without further preface, she related to him the history of Herbert's offer and of her provisional acceptance of it.

Tristram heard her out, making no comment, and when she had finished said: 'I think I would rather not advise you.'

'I am not bound to follow your advice,' answered Hope, smiling faintly. 'Let me at least know what you think.'

'Well, then I will say to you what I should say to my own daughter, if I had one. I know something of Mr. Herbert, and all that I know of him is in his favour. He is no longer a very young man; he has been rich and his own master from his boyhood, and he has never made a fool of himself in any way. From what you tell me, and from what I have heard from others, I should think that he would be a kind husband. There is no reason why you should not marry him, and every reason why you should, except one. My belief is that love—in the sense of what is called being in love—is a curse rather than a blessing. At the best, it

promotes selfishness, and at the worst, it brings about jealousies and broken hearts and all kinds of unhappiness. Marriages are made without any regard to it in France, and I never could see that French couples were at all less attached to one another than English couples. Indeed, family ties are far stronger with them than with us. But I know perfectly well that all this doesn't and can't convince you. Nature has the same method with all young creatures, and an old fellow's experience has no chance against her. I am afraid I cannot be of much service to you in this matter.'

'But it comes to this,' said Hope, after pondering for awhile, 'that you do advise me to marry Mr. Herbert.'

'Yes, I won't shirk the responsibility; it is what I should advise. But I may be quite wrong. My mind is warped—I have suffered too much——'

He rose and took a turn or two up and down the room. 'One thing,' he said, 'I may tell you, for your comfort; though you

have not genius, you have talent, and plenty of it. Painting will always be a resource and a consolation to you, whatever happens. Nothing can rob you of that.'

But perhaps this seemed rather cold comfort to Hope, who made no rejoinder while she put on her hat and jacket.

Tristram accompanied her to the outer door and held her hand for a minute, saying 'God bless you!' when she bade him good-bye. It was tacitly understood between them that she would return no more to the studio in which she had spent so many happy, sanguine hours.

CHAPTER XII

LADY JANE IS MADE HAPPY.

THE wedding of Lord Middleborough, an event of some magnitude in its way, took place immediately after Easter. The ceremony, in accordance with a custom recently introduced, was performed in the afternoon, and was graced by the presence of as many dukes, duchesses, cabinet ministers, ex-cabinet ministers, foreign ambassadors, and social celebrities as the eye of a fond mother could wish to rest upon. So large was the throng of invited guests that, when these had been marshalled to their places, and the claims of the representatives of the press had been attended to, there was not much room left for the British public, which had assembled in great force, as it always does at such

times, and which, for the most part, had to content itself with waiting outside in a bitter east wind and admiring the gay clothing of the ladies, as they hurried across the strip of red carpet from their carriages to the church.

The bride, a rather pretty little blue-eyed woman, was honoured by a general murmur of approbation; the bridesmaids also were pronounced worthy, both in person and in costume, of the occasion; but perhaps the most unequivocal success of the day was obtained by the tall, pale girl, dressed in French grey, who, if she had been listening, might have heard herself described by an appreciative butcher's-boy as 'a *real* beauty'—which expression of opinion was instantly confirmed by the bystanders. Nor was it only among the plebeian herd upon the pavement that the appearance of this lady caused a momentary sensation. The more critical assemblage within the building did not fail to remark her delicate, high-bred features, the graceful carriage of her head, and her large and rather sorrowful grey eyes. The

majority, not knowing who she was, whispered inquiries about her, and those who did know replied : ' Oh, that is Miss Lefroy, the daughter of the late man. Lost a huge fortune in the Central England Bank smash,' which generally elicited a murmur of ' Poor thing ! no wonder she looks so sad.'

A few well-informed persons mentioned a rumour that she was about to be married to ' that queer fellow, Dick Herbert ' ; and this greatly increased the curiosity with which she was regarded ; for women of all ranks, ages, and dispositions are interested in a marriage, and especial interest would attach to that of Dick Herbert—not so much because he was a ' queer fellow,' as because he was so rich, and had been for such a number of years an ostensible bachelor, that nine people out of ten believed him to have a wife somewhere who was not presentable.

Hope was entirely unconscious of being noticed or discussed, and even if she had heard what was being said about her she would not have cared much. The days when

the coupling of her name with Herbert's would have brought a flush of anger into her cheeks were past and gone ; it was very likely—more likely than not, now—that her name would be permanently coupled with his. No further direct pressure had been brought to bear upon her either by her uncle or by Lady Jane ; but in a hundred little ways the conviction had been brought home to her that, if she threw away this chance, the reproaches heaped upon her would be greater than she would be able to bear. Since Tristram had swept away her dream of life into space, she had grown apathetic about the future, which seemed to hold no golden promises for her ; she had not definitely decided what she would do ; but she knew very well that Herbert would say something to her that day, and she was disposed to abide by his judgment, whatever it might be. She could see him on the opposite side of the church, towering a head above his neighbours ; she watched him while the choir sang ‘The voice that breathed o’er Eden,’ and while the Bishop, assisted by his

satellites, proceeded with the form of words which was to convert Alice Leïroy into a viscountess. Once their eyes met, and he smiled. He had a kindly, pleasant, honest sort of face. 'I don't think he will beat me, at all events,' Hope said to herself, with something between an incipient laugh and a sob in her throat.

Well, it would soon be over now; she would soon know her fate; and it would be something to have done with indecision. Time, plodding on with even steps, brought her nearer and nearer to the moment which she half dreaded and half wished for. The ceremony was concluded; the crowd—not quite so large a one as had been present at the church—repaired to Eaton Square to inspect the wedding presents, and gradually melted away; the bride and bridegroom, being possessed of three large houses of their own, drove off to spend the honeymoon in one belonging to a relative, which had been lent them for that purpose; Hope was standing alone in a small morning-room, looking out of

the window and waiting for the sound of an approaching footstep, which she expected every instant to hear.

She had already shaken hands with Herbert, but only a few words had passed between them, and it was hardly to be supposed that he would go away without a longer interview. He did not, however, seem inclined to hurry himself, and Hope was rather angry with him for keeping her waiting. She could hear voices and laughter downstairs, where, no doubt, he was engaged in conversation with the rest of the family, and she could fancy it all—Mr. Lefroy rubbing his hands and saying, ‘Thank goodness that is over!’—Gertrude reporting some acrimonious speech of Lady Chatterton’s; Lady Jane smiling contentedly, and exclaiming, all of a sudden: ‘Dear me! where can Hope be? I wish you would go and see what has become of her, Dick’—and then a slow, deliberate step mounting the stairs. Oh, why didn’t they make haste and get it all ended!

In reality, her suspense was not prolonged

for more than five minutes or so. She heard the door opened and shut ; someone entered the room and advanced until he was close to her elbow, and then, just for a second, a wild notion took possession of her. Suppose it should not be he? Suppose it should be—somebody else?

But of course it was he ; and it was his voice that was saying cheerfully : ‘ Well, you didn’t write to me, after all.’

‘ I had nothing to write about,’ answered Hope, still looking out of the window. Her hands were cold and damp, a sudden access of nervousness had come upon her, and she did not venture to look at him.

But he showed no consciousness of her distress. ‘ I thought,’ he said, ‘ that perhaps you would let me know how you were getting on. Is Mr. Tristram encouraging?’

Hope turned round and dropped into the nearest chair. ‘ No,’ she answered ; ‘ I have not got on at all ; I never shall get on now. Haven’t you heard? Didn’t they tell you?’ Then, recollecting herself, ‘ But of course they

could not. I did not mention it to them, and no one has ever asked me about it. I suppose they knew all along that I should fail.'

She glanced at him to see whether he showed any sign of surprise, or pleasure or regret; but his face expressed nothing at all.

'Isn't it rather too soon to despair?' was his only comment.

'Mr. Tristram says not. He told me that I had no chance whatever.'

'What a brute!'

'He is the best friend that I have in the world. I asked him to tell me the truth, and I was very glad that he told it me without phrases.'

'And what are you going to do now?' Herbert asked, after a pause.

'I don't know,' answered Hope.

Presently she glanced up at him again and saw that he was sorry for her. He certainly looked very kind; but it is never quite pleasant to be pitied. 'Since I can't have what I want, I must do without it, that is all,' she remarked rather brusquely.

There was nothing to be urged against so self-evident a proposition: but Herbert was able to put forward another equally indisputable. 'When one has got what one wants, one doesn't always like it,' he observed. And, obtaining no response, he went on: 'Now, about the alternative suggestion that I made to you—have you thought any more of it?'

'Of course I have thought of it,' Hope answered slowly.

'And you don't much fancy it?'

'I hardly know what to say. I can't feel about marriage as you and everybody else seem to feel. Mr. Herbert, do you think we *ought* to marry, not caring in the least for one another?'

'The case is not quite so bad as that, is it? Our understanding was that it wouldn't be a love-match. Surely that doesn't exclude affection.'

That passing sensation of wonder and resentment which Hope had felt once before swept over her again, as she raised her eyes

to his frank, good-tempered face. She did not wish him to be in love with her ; but at the same time it was a little strange and a little unflattering that he should be so entirely free from any idea of such a thing. ‘It does not exclude affection, of course,’ she agreed ; ‘only sometimes I am afraid—but perhaps I may be mistaken. If you are content to have it so, I am.’

‘That’s all right ; then we’ll consider it settled,’ said he, with a cheerful air of relief. ‘It won’t be my fault if you ever repent of your bargain. I shall remember my promise : you will have your own way and live your own life, and whenever you find me a bore you will only have to say so, and I’ll take myself off. I’m always ready to book my passage for the other side of the world at a moment’s notice. Do you like yachting?’

Hope shook her head. ‘I hate the sea.’

‘Well, I love it ; so that you can count upon being rid of me for a good part of the summer, at all events.’

‘And Mr. Francis will keep you company,

I suppose,' said Hope, laughing a little, though she did not feel very merry. 'Do you know that I met your friend Mr. Francis a short time ago? He gave me quite a new view of your character.'

'Oh, he did, did he?'

'Yes; he had heard a report that you were going to be married, and he was very much annoyed and rather rude about it. He said you were the last man in the world who ought to make a marriage of convenience, that nobody was good enough for you, and that unless your wife could share your tastes—does that mean taking long cruises without being sea-sick?—she would spoil your life.'

'Francis is an ass,' remarked Herbert placidly.

'He did not strike me as being that.'

'He is though—a clever ass; there are lots of them about. I am a stupid ass if you like; but I do know what I want.'

'Why should you want this?' exclaimed Hope. 'I cannot understand why you should want it!'

‘I thought I had told you down at Helston. But, never mind, I am not afraid of the result.’

Hope, however, was a good deal afraid. She got up and moved restlessly about the room. All her life long, until recently, she had been accustomed to be loved; she was not sure of herself and did not know what she might become if in future she was only to be tolerated. Perhaps it was not very dignified; but an impulse which she could not resist prompted her to pause suddenly beside the man who—whether he admitted it or not—must control her destiny. ‘You will be good to me, won’t you?’ she murmured appealingly.

What could anyone say or do in answer to such a question? Herbert rose and took possession of her hands. ‘My dear,’ he said kindly, ‘you may trust me for that.’ And then he bent down and kissed her forehead.

If he thought such an action natural and permissible under the circumstances, it was because he really knew very little of the

queer nature of women. Hope started away from him, flushing painfully.

‘You must not do that!’ she cried, with tears in her voice. ‘There must be nothing—*nothing* of that kind. I thought at least we were to have no pretence!’

Herbert looked considerably crestfallen, and a tinge of colour found its way also into his sunburnt cheek. ‘I beg your pardon,’ he said, humbly; ‘I will not offend you in that way again. I fancied——’

‘You fancied that it was the proper thing to do,’ she interrupted, ‘but it is not; and your having fancied so only shows——Oh, I don’t think I can marry you! I don’t think I can!’ she concluded, sinking down into her chair again.

Yet even while she said this she felt that she had gone too far now to recede, and he had not much difficulty in making his peace with her. Only she was very urgent upon the point of there being no ‘make-believe’ between them, and as to this he declared himself to be quite of one mind with her.

‘You know, I always told you that in my opinion the one important thing is to start fair,’ he said. ‘If we are only honest with one another we are sure to get on all right. I want you, if you will, to tell me everything, without bothering yourself to consider whether it will hurt my feelings or not. I always like to hear the truth, pleasant or unpleasant.’

‘I think I may promise that,’ Hope answered meditatively. ‘I have told you nothing but the truth, so far; you know all that there is to know about me. And I will try not to spoil your life,’ she added, with a slight smile.

‘No fear of that. We thoroughly understand one another now. We are not lovers; we are two friends who are going to set up house together, isn’t that it?’

‘Yes; that is it,’ replied Hope.

And, having committed themselves to the above absurd and utterly impracticable scheme of existence, these two fools went downstairs to make it known, being well aware that only the warmest congratulations awaited the announcement of their folly.

Nothing, indeed, could have been more genuine or more heartily expressed than the contentment of Mr. Lefroy and Lady Jane. The cloud which had arisen of late between them and their niece was at once and for ever dispelled ; Herbert, who had to catch a train, soon went away ; and hardly had the door closed behind him before Lady Jane began to contemplate arrangements for a second matrimonial function.

‘It can hardly take place before the end of the season,’ she said. ‘There will be the trousseau to be provided, and I should think most likely he will want to re-furnish Farn-don. I haven’t seen the place for a long time ; but when I was there last it looked as if it wanted a great deal doing to it. I wonder whether his sister will go on living there. I suppose she must ; and yet I am not sure that she will, for she is an independent sort of girl, and she has money of her own. No doubt she will marry before long. Somebody said something about that Cunningham boy having paid her a good deal of attention. It would

be a good match for him ; but I don't know——'

'Oh, Aunt Jane,' interrupted Hope, 'do let us try to talk about anything in the world for the next few months except marrying and giving in marriage !'

But that was the last faint symptom of revolt that escaped her. As the days went on she became reconciled to her lot, and saw that it might have been a worse one. Happiness, she kept on saying to herself, is not everything ; and, besides, there are many kinds of happiness. One kind, certainly, might be derived from having satisfied everybody. When one has fought and has been beaten, it is a consolation to be kindly and generously treated by the conquerors ; and on this score Hope had no cause for complaint. She might, had she been so minded, have gone to Tristram's studio every day now, and Lady Jane's maid would never have been too busy to accompany her ; her uncle troubled himself more than once to gratify her love of art by taking her to one of the picture

galleries; her aunt never pressed her to do anything that she did not like, nor quarrelled with her for declining to go out into the world. These may not have been very important concessions, but, such as they were, she was grateful for them. She recognised the fact that she had reached the end of a chapter in her life, and appreciated the consideration which allowed her to pause before opening a fresh one.

CHAPTER XIII.

JACOB STILES.

It can hardly be expected that the reader will recollect a passing allusion once made by Mr. Herbert to a certain young *protégé* of his named Jacob Stiles. The fact is that Mr. Herbert was not very fond of alluding to this youth, whose benefactor he had been, having reasons for keeping silence about him besides those which modesty must always impose upon the truly charitable.

Jacob Stiles, as his name (which was a source of deep grief to him) almost seemed to imply, was an object of charity, and since his early childhood had never been anything else. It had come to pass that, as Dick Herbert was riding homewards one autumn evening shortly after he had attained his

majority—and consequently some fifteen years before the date of the present narrative—his path was abruptly stopped by a diminutive urchin, who piped out : ‘ Oh, if you please, sir, father said I was to arst you what’s won the Leger.’ Dick, then, as always, a man of few words, gave the desired information, glanced curiously at his ragged, black-eyed little questioner, and rode on. The incident might have escaped his memory, had not the result of that particular St. Leger brought about a tragic occurrence of which he, in common with the rest of the neighbourhood, was speedily informed. This was the suicide of one Stiles, a stranger in those parts, who had recently been taken as a rough-rider into the employment of a local horse-dealer, and who was found hanging in his master’s stables on the morning after the race, with the following brief confession in a pocket of his coat : ‘ It’s the Leger as done it. I don’t want no more of this life. Will some kind friend please to save my poor little lad from the workus?’

This appeal found its way to the somewhat soft heart of Dick Herbert. He sought out the boy, found him in one of the cottages in the village, recognised him as the same whom he had encountered on the previous evening, carried him off to Farndon Court to be washed, fed, and comforted, and retained him there with a view to discovering, as he said, ‘what could be made of him.’ A great many things might have been made of him, for he proved to be one of the sharpest boys that ever was known, but perhaps a judicious person, remembering the proverb about silk purses and sows’ ears, would have reflected that there were certain things into which he could not possibly be turned. Dick Herbert was only twenty-one at that time, and was not quite as judicious as he subsequently became. He was delighted with the little fellow’s shrewd replies to his questions; he was still more delighted to see with what tenacity that atom could stick to a horse; and when he discovered that Jacob, in addition to his other talents, could draw with a precision and spirit

amazing in one of such tender years, he concluded that, if ever there was a case in which a thorough education would be a boon worth bestowing, it was here.

This was all very well, but to remove the boy entirely out of the station to which he had been born was another affair. To do Dick justice, he had at first no intention of falling into any such error. He proposed to have his *protégé* educated, and then to give him a start in whatever trade he might seem to be best fitted for. But there were difficulties in the way of carrying out this sensible programme. Jacob learnt with surprising rapidity; in everything that he undertook he excelled; as he grew older he manifested a decided dislike to associating with the servants, who, on their side, cordially reciprocated his sentiments. Thus it came about that, when he was at Farndon for the holidays, he spent most of his time in the company of his patron (who preferred not to be called his master), and was made a great deal of by his patron's bachelor friends.

Farndon Court was then a house in which only bachelors and married men on leave of absence were to be met ; for old Mrs. Herbert, who was still alive, dwelt at a watering-place in the West of England, the climate of Berkshire not agreeing with her health. One may conjecture that had any lady presided over Dick's household that clever young outcast, Jacob Stiles, would not have been permitted to dine with his betters, and adjourn to the billiard-room or the smoking-room with them later in the evening. But if the lad got any harm from such associations it was not apparent upon the surface. His schoolmasters gave glowing reports of him ; his career was decided upon ; he was in due time to become an artist, and there was every ground for believing that he would also become a successful one. Whence he derived his pictorial skill was a mystery of which his defective pedigree could afford no solution ; but a very simple application of the law of inheritance sufficed to account for his great love and knowledge of horses ; and it must be owned

that this endeared him to Dick more than all his other gifts put together. Mr. Herbert can hardly be said to have been at any time upon the turf; but he usually had one or two animals in training, and he kept a few brood-mares with a view to raising thoroughbred stock. Now Jacob's eye for a horse was nothing short of marvellous. Not only was his opinion invaluable as regarded the purchase of yearlings, but he could tell, almost at a glance, whether a foal would ever come to anything or not. 'Confound the boy! he can't make a mistake!' Dick would exclaim, admiringly.

He himself, however, was quite capable of making mistakes, and he made a very serious one when he fell into the habit of taking this admirable judge with him to the principal race-meetings. It was an innocent pleasure, Dick thought; and in his case it certainly was so. He did not bet, and was careful to warn his young companion solemnly against that fatal practice. Notwithstanding this admonition, Jacob did bet—possibly that, too,

was a *damnosa hæreditas* which it was hard for him to resist—and the worst of it was that he had to bet on the sly. Unluckily for him his ventures were not only successful but were never found out; this form of gambling became a passion with him, and Mr. Herbert's prolonged absences from home afforded him opportunities of indulging in it by which he was not slow to profit. His conscience did not fail to reproach him for so doing; but self-reproach is seldom of much value as a curb.

When Jacob was nineteen years of age, Nemesis, in the shape of a disastrous Ascot week, overtook him, in company with many others of higher social position. His money was all spent; settling-day was near, and he was at his wits' end. One morning he saw Dick Herbert's cheque-book lying upon the library table; he hastily tore a scrap of paper out of it and scribbled thereon an imitation of that imprudent gentleman's signature which would have been more exact if his fingers had not trembled so much. How could he have

supposed that so foolish a fraud would escape detection? He may have counted upon Dick's well-known carelessness in money-matters; but it is more likely that he yielded to temptation in one of those moments of terror and bewilderment which are taken into consideration by merciful jurymen when they return a verdict of 'suicide while in an unsound state of mind.' He took the cheque into Windsor, had it cashed by a clerk, and the very next day Mr. Herbert received a note from the manager of the bank, requesting him to call at his earliest convenience.

When Dick, in obedience to this summons, entered the manager's private room, that functionary, with a very grave face, regretted to inform him that a cheque for 200*l.*—an obvious forgery, purporting to bear his signature—had been presented across the counter and inadvertently honoured by one of the clerks. 'And I am very sorry to add, Mr. Herbert, that the money was paid to the young man Stiles.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Dick. 'Let's have a

look at it.' And, after examining the paper—
'So that's what you call a forgery?'

'Surely, Mr. Herbert, you must see that it is.'

'Oh, no,' answered Dick; 'don't see it at all. Why should it be a forgery? "R. N. Herbert"—that's the way I always sign, isn't it?'

'Mr. Herbert, do I understand you to recognise this as your signature?' inquired the manager solemnly.

Dick nodded; and then the manager stared at him, and he stared at the manager; and the latter said no more, but thought a good deal. 'Would it not be well, Mr. Herbert, that in future we should supply you with cheques made payable to Order and not to Bearer?' was his only remark, as his visitor rose.

Dick answered 'Yes, if you like,' picked up the cheque and rode home.

As he was dismounting from his horse he caught sight of Jacob, hailed him, led him into the library, and producing that terrible

slip of blue paper, held it up before his eyes. 'Your writing, I presume?' he remarked, laconically.

The unfortunate criminal could not get out a word of reply. His knees trembled under him, he turned pale, and a cold sweat broke out upon his forehead. Herbert had his hunting-crop in his hand.

'Jake,' he said, quietly, 'I'm going to give you a thrashing.' And without more ado he caught the young man by the collar and administered the punishment alluded to with the utmost vigour of a powerful right arm.

Jacob never uttered a word or a groan. It was no nominal thrashing that was inflicted upon him; but perhaps he did not care about the pain. When it was over, he had just strength enough left to crawl away to his room and hide himself. He richly deserved all that he had got, and was let off, upon the whole, very cheaply. One must not venture to claim sympathy for a man who rewards innumerable kindnesses by forging his benefactor's name. We are all sinners and frankly

admit as much once a week, if not oftener ; we do things that we ought not to do, and leave undone what we ought to do ; but as for lying, thieving, and cheating—*allons donc !* such mean offences are far beneath us, and we have every right to despise those who commit them. Perhaps so ; but this poor wretch was base-born, and may not have possessed our noble instincts. Possibly even for him some allowance may be made by generous minds.

Dick Herbert had a very generous mind ; but there never lived a man to whom it was less possible to make allowance for certain sins. It may be that he held too exalted views of the virtue of his fellow-creatures ; at any rate, he trusted them implicitly until they deceived him ; after which, no earthly power could induce him to trust them a second time. He had done his duty to Jacob in administering to him a lesson not likely to be forgotten. When the offender came and threw himself at his feet, in an agony of shame and remorse, he freely forgave him, saying :

‘We will never mention the subject again;’ and he never did mention it again. But it was no longer in his power either to esteem, or to like the young fellow, nor was it in his power to hide the contempt that he felt for him. His kindness did not cease, but his friendliness did; and Jacob, who was as sensitive as he was sharp, felt and appreciated the distinction.

Whether the above catastrophe was the making or the marring of Jacob’s career must remain an open question, since no one can pronounce judgment upon what might have been. It cured him at once and for ever of betting; he made a vow, and kept it, that the ring should know him no more; but it may be said to have spoilt his temper, which, perhaps, was not naturally a sweet one. His life, even when he was among his fellow art-students, in London, was somewhat solitary; when he was at Farndon it was completely so. He had his own rooms, and, as he showed that he preferred to shut himself up, he was not often asked to leave them. It is difficult

for a man who has been soundly horsewhipped to conceal all traces of the fact; and the servants, who had never had any love for Jacob, guessed what had happened to him. If they did not find out the exact truth, they arrived at something not very far removed from it; and gave themselves the satisfaction of sneering at him in a way which he could not resent. By one hasty, dishonourable act, he had incurred permanent obloquy, and he knew it. For years the dominant idea in his mind was a sense of the cruel harshness of fate, and of the injustice which took no account of repentance. Then Miss Herbert came to live at Farndon, and it was not his good fortune to commend himself favourably to Miss Herbert, who alleged, with perfect truth, that the young man had been placed in an absurdly false position by her brother.

False or not, there was no remedy for it now. He must remain where he was, until his brush should bring him in a sufficient income to enable him to set up his household gods elsewhere; and even when that wished-

for day came he would not be free—he never could be free—from the weight of an immense obligation. In the meantime, his conduct continued to be exemplary, and his talent was recognised by all competent judges. Ambition of a kind he had, but it was not a hopeful kind of ambition. He developed into a rather sullen and taciturn young man—not a pleasant young man—possibly even a dangerous one, it might be fancied, by the look of him. Yet his thoughts were seldom bad thoughts, only intensely bitter. His feeling towards Herbert would be difficult to define, and he certainly never attempted to define it to himself. He admired the man, he respected him; he would have loved him if things had fallen out differently. As it was, there were certain moments when he felt as if earth could afford him no greater joy than to detect his benefactor in the commission of some ignoble action. It will be perceived that poor Jacob had great natural disadvantages to contend against.

The little station of Farndon Road is only

about a mile and a half from Farndon Court, and as Dick had not been sure how soon he would be able to get away from Lord Middleborough's wedding, he had given no orders that he should be met. When he left the train, however, he found Jacob Stiles waiting for him in a dog-cart, and was a little surprised by a mark of attention which had been frequent enough in the old days, but which he had latterly ceased to look for.

'Hallo, Jake!' he said, 'what brings you down here?'

'I had to go into Windsor about something,' replied the other, 'and I thought I might as well drive round to the station, in case you came down by this train.'

'I intended to walk,' said Dick; 'but since you are here, I don't mind taking a lift. No; you drive,' he added, as he climbed into the dog-cart, and his companion handed him the reins; 'I'm going to smoke a cigarette.'

Jacob did as he was requested, and drove on some little distance, before saying: 'I wanted to tell you that I have sold another

picture.' He spoke with his eyes lowered, which was a trick that he had.

'Have you?' said Dick. 'Glad to hear it. I hope you got a good price.'

'Yes,' answered the other, 'I think so. I think I got as much as it was worth.'

He had a slow, somewhat deprecating method of enunciation, which, taken in conjunction with his thin, pale cheeks, and his habit of holding his head low, caused strangers to think that he must either be very unhappy, or be weighed down by some guilty secret—an impression which, as we know, was tolerably correct. But for these peculiarities he would have passed muster easily enough, having a face which was rather handsome than plain, and a well-knit, well-proportioned figure.

'The gentleman who bought that picture has given me an order for two more,' he went on, 'and I am to do some illustrations for the "Grosvenor Magazine."'

'Come, that's capital news. Did you drive round to tell me about it, Jake?'

The young fellow raised his eyes—they were very dark and very brilliant eyes—for the first time, and shot a quick, sidelong glance at his questioner. ‘I thought you would be glad to hear,’ he answered. He seemed as if he were going to say something more, but apparently changed his mind, and, drawing the whip gently across the horse’s flanks, slightly increased the pace at which they were moving.

‘By-the-way,’ observed Dick presently, ‘I have got a piece of news too. I’m going to be married.’

This time Jacob’s eyes were opened to their utmost extent, and were turned full upon Dick’s face, which remained impassive. ‘To be married? You!’ he exclaimed. ‘Do you really mean it?’

‘Oh, yes; I have been thinking about it for some time past. It is a Miss Lefroy; not a sister of Lady Middleborough’s—her cousin. You and she ought to become friends, I should think; for she takes a great interest in art, and paints like a professional.’

Jacob smiled very slightly ; he may have been thinking that neither the future Mrs. Herbert nor any other lady was at all likely to make friends with him. From dwelling so continually upon one thought, he had come to have a morbid conviction that he looked like a forger, and that everybody must suspect him of being one. Presently he said in a formal, hesitating way, as if he were repeating a speech previously learnt by heart : 'I am very glad that you are going to be married at last. I hope you will be as happy as you deserve to be.'

'Thanks,' answered Dick briefly. After a minute or two he asked : 'Did you happen to take a look at the Electricity foal to-day?'

'Yes. I don't much fancy him myself ; but Miss Herbert thinks he will be the best one we ever bred. She arrived just before luncheon. I suppose you knew that she was coming?'

'No, by George ! I didn't,' replied Dick, looking a trifle perturbed. 'The last time I heard from her she said she wouldn't be here

for another fortnight. I rather suspect, you know,' he went on musingly, 'that Carry won't altogether like this. In fact, I'm sure she won't like it. If you come to that, it would be ridiculous to expect her to like it.'

These remarks partook so much of the nature of a soliloquy, that Jacob did not feel called upon to make any response to them, and nothing more was said until they reached the hall door, where Miss Herbert, who had been out riding, happened at that moment to be dismounting from her horse.

She was a tall, dark, well-made woman, who looked both young and handsome in her riding habit, but who, under other circumstances, was quite evidently thirty years of age. She resembled her brother in nothing at all, except in a certain abruptness of speech, and was far less universally popular than he. Nevertheless, she had a very large acquaintance, and was said to have refused many eligible suitors. She had a considerable fortune of her own.

'Well, Carry,' said Dick as he descended

from the dog-cart, 'so here you are again. Where are you from last?'

He did not pay much attention to her reply, but walked up the steps beside her, and, with his usual promptitude in coming to the point, said: 'I have something to tell you. I am going to be married in the course of the summer, to Hope Lefroy, the niece of the Helston Abbey man.'

'As I have never set eyes on the girl,' observed Miss Herbert, without any manifestation of surprise, 'I can't tell whether to congratulate you or not.'

'You may congratulate me. And I say, Carry, I should like you two to be friends, if you could manage it.'

'I doubt whether we shall be able to manage it. Do you recollect ever to have come across a case of sisters-in-law living in the same house who were friends? I don't.'

'Well, let us try to make yours an exceptional case.'

They had entered the drawing-room by this time. Miss Herbert had seated herself in

an arm-chair and had laid her gloves and whip down on the tea-table at her elbow. Dick leant with his shoulders against the mantel-piece and his hands in his pockets.

‘You are bound to see a good deal of one another,’ he continued, ‘and you know, Carry, you are an infernally disagreeable woman sometimes. You don’t mind my saying so, do you?’

‘I am sure you would not be deterred from saying so by such a trifle as my objecting to be called infernally disagreeable.’

‘Ah, but you can be infernally agreeable too, if you like. I wish you would take it into your head to be agreeable to her.’

‘My dear Dick, I hope I am not so silly or so ill-bred as to quarrel with your wife; but if you expect to see us tripping out of the dining-room after dinner with our arms twined round each other’s waists, you had better prepare yourself for a disappointment. Demonstrations of that kind must be undertaken by you.’

Dick laughed. ‘There won’t be any

demonstrations of that kind ; don't be alarmed. We shall be a very sensible matter-of-fact couple, and we have no intention of going in for love-making. Besides, I daresay I shall be away from home pretty often.'

'Oh, you have already arranged that? If it is not an impertinent question, may I ask why you are marrying a girl with whom you are not in love? I can understand that she may have her reasons for marrying you.'

'We both have our reasons, and very good ones too. I needn't run through the list of them. I really think you will like Hope ; but I won't say any more. If I praise her too much I shall probably set you against her.'

'Naturally,' observed Miss Herbert, and then changed the subject.

Jacob no longer dined with the family ; his meals were served to him by reluctant servants in his own sitting-room upstairs—another painful incident of his false position. Sometimes, however, if there was nobody staying in the house, he would make his appearance

in the smoking-room at a late hour ; and he did so this evening.

Dick looked up from the 'Field,' and nodded to him as he entered and advanced towards the fire, his cheeks somewhat pale, and the embarrassment of his manner more marked than usual. It was only after he had twice opened his lips without speaking that he managed to say :

'I told you I had sold another picture. I have been saving up what I have earned lately, and here it is.' He held out a bundle of bank-notes. 'It's—it's—the two hundred pounds that I stole,' he said, a sudden flush mounting to his cheek-bones as he forced himself to utter that uncompromising word.

Dick frowned, as he had a way of doing when he was distressed. 'What nonsense, Jake!' he exclaimed. 'I thought we had agreed not to mention that affair again. It is all over and—done with.' He had been going to say 'forgotten,' but checked himself.

'It can never be done with for me,' answered the young man, upon whom the

significance of the substituted phrase was not lost. 'The curse will be upon me to my dying day. If I never commit another offence against God or man, it will make no difference. It can't be helped, I suppose.'

Dick was not much moved by this outburst, which struck him as exaggerated and uncalled-for. 'My good fellow,' he said, not very felicitously, 'I don't want the money; it wasn't the loss of two hundred pounds that I cared about.'

'I am quite aware of that,' replied the other bitterly; 'but I hope you will take the money, all the same, to please me. It's—a wedding present, if you like,' he added, with a faint smile.

'I am very willing to accept your present, Jake, if that will make you any happier,' said Dick, taking the notes and tossing them carelessly into a drawer.

Unlike the generality of rich men, he cared less about money than about any other earthly thing, and treated this considerable sum as if it had been the merest trifle. He wanted to

add something kind, but scarcely knew what to say. The pale, sullen face and the down-cast eyes which refused to meet his, impressed him disagreeably. The form of consolation which finally commended itself to him was not quite the best that could have been hit upon.

‘Come, Jake, don’t look so gloomy over it. Nobody but ourselves knows what happened three years ago, and nobody else ever will know. You have made a fresh start; go on and prosper, and, in God’s name, give up worrying yourself about what can’t be undone.’

Jacob made some inarticulate murmur and presently went away. He had been quite prepared for his reception; he had felt sure beforehand that Dick would never say, ‘Let us be friends again,’ yet he was sore and disappointed. If those few words could have been spoken, his character might even now have been altered; but the words that he had heard were so many fresh wounds, which would smart for weeks and months to come,

and might not improbably poison his sick mind beyond hope of cure, as the sting of an insect will sometimes prove fatal to those whose blood is in a diseased state. But how was a straightforward, plain-dealing fellow like Dick Herbert to understand all this?

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

ONE afternoon, some weeks after the announcement of Hope's engagement to Mr. Herbert, a young gentleman, whose somewhat perturbed mien contrasted with the very careful accuracy of his get-up, rang at the door of one of the smallest houses in Green Street, Mayfair. He asked for Mrs. Pierpoint, was admitted, and presently groped his way into a diminutive drawing-room, darkened to suit modern requirements, and a little over-crowded with the Satsuma and Kioto ware, the old silver and enamels and miniatures which are the outward evidences of modern taste.

Behind a tea-table in a corner of the diminutive drawing-room sat a diminutive lady, who immediately said: 'I know what is the matter. You have heard that your flame

is going to be married, and you have come to tell me that it is all my fault.'

'And so it is your fault,' Captain Cunningham declared, dropping into a low chair and casting his hat away from him with the air of one to whom glossy hats could henceforward be neither a care nor a consolation. 'If it hadn't been for you, this would never have happened.'

'If I could think so,' remarked Mrs. Pierpoint, 'I should be able to flatter myself that I had not lived altogether in vain; but I am afraid I must not claim all that credit. The utmost that I have done has been to save you from getting into one more stupid scrape.'

Mrs. Pierpoint had been for some years Bertie Cunningham's friend, confidant, and adviser. Her age was nearer forty than thirty; but she had preserved her girlish figure and as much as could be expected of the beauty for which she had once been famous. Time could not mar the perfect profile formed by that low brow, that little Greek nose, that short upper lip and rounded chin. Some

lines, it is true, showed themselves about the mouth and eyes, and the complexion was no longer what it had been; but the abundant brown hair was as yet unstreaked with grey, only the gold having faded out of it. She was a bright, vivacious woman, who liked hunting in winter, and society in spring, and yachting in summer, and Bertie Cunningham all the year round. Some people were pleased to say disagreeable things about her; but as these things were not true, there is no need to dwell upon them. She had a husband with whom she managed to live on terms of amity, though there had been a time when she had believed that this would be impossible to her. Many things are found possible which do not appear so at first sight. Mrs. Pierpoint had learnt to shut her eyes to what she did not wish to see, to accept what there was no satisfactory mode of escape from, and to conceal any sufferings that she may have felt from a world which dislikes nothing so much as the contemplation of suffering. It is probable that her moral standard was not a very exalted

one; but she was a brave, kindhearted little soul, who tried to do her duty according to her lights, and spoke evil of neither man nor woman.

‘If it hadn’t been for you,’ Bertie Cunningham went on reproachfully, ‘I should have got those people to ask me down to Helston at Christmas. You know I should.’

‘And afterwards?’

‘Afterwards?—*afterwards*! Well, I should have seen her, and she wouldn’t have gone and engaged herself to this fellow, that’s all. Oh, you may call me conceited if you like—I don’t care. I’m much too miserable to care what I am called. Herbert, of all men! She can’t possibly love him, you know. Now, don’t go and say that she does.’

‘Would it be any comfort to you to think that she did.’

‘Yes—no—I don’t know. I am beyond reach of comfort. You don’t understand what it is; you’re so awfully stony-hearted. I should just like to see you desperately, miserably in love with somebody!’

‘I fancy that I have outlived the power ; but thank you, all the same. I have seen you in that condition once or twice before, and I don’t feel much alarmed about you. You’ll be all right again in a few weeks.’

‘That is a most horrid, unfriendly thing to say!’ cried Cunningham ; ‘ besides being perfectly untrue. You never in your life saw me in love before. Some fancies I may have had—there’s nothing to laugh at—I say, I may have had a passing fancy or two ; but nothing in the least like this. This is the real thing, and I shall never get over it.’

‘Do you think you will die of it, then ? Have a cup of tea in the meantime.’

‘I said nothing about dying,’ returned the young man, with some asperity ; ‘I said I should never get over it, and I never shall. If I were talking to anybody but you, I should say that my heart was broken ; but I won’t say so to you, because as a matter of course you would begin to laugh. You *are* laughing already. Well, I suppose there must be something killingly funny in the

suffering of a friend, since it amuses you so much ; but I don't quite see the joke myself.'

'I am not laughing,' said the little lady, who indeed had only smiled. 'I am really sorry for you, and I quite believe that it hurts for the moment ; only I cannot pretend to regret Miss Lefroy's engagement. You know as well as I do that you never could have married her, and therefore——'

'Oh, yes ; that's the way you kept going on all the winter. I wish to heaven I hadn't listened to you !'

'Do you know that you are becoming rather rude ? But never mind ; I didn't expect gratitude. What I was going to say was that, as you could not have afforded to marry Miss Lefroy yourself, it really cannot signify much to you whom she marries or when she marries. To be sure,' added Mrs. Pierpoint, thoughtfully, 'I would rather have heard that she was engaged to any other man than Mr. Herbert. It may lead to complications.'

'What complications ?' Cunningham asked.

‘You know what I mean. I am afraid you will be apt to make love to the wife when you ought to be making love to the sister.’

Cunningham groaned. ‘I wish you were not so determined to marry me to Miss Herbert! I am not going to marry her; I am not going to marry at all. Why on earth should I?’

‘Because it is good for you. Because you want money; because Carry Herbert is by far the best-looking heiress that I know, and because you really did like her very much not so long ago.’

‘Like her!—oh, yes, I liked her well enough; but that was before I saw Hope—Miss Lefroy, I mean. Everything is changed now, and there is only one woman in the world whom I could possibly marry. I say, do you believe Dick Herbert is in love with her?’

‘I know nothing about it, but I presume so. According to you, her charms are sufficient to account for his being in love with her.’

‘Yes ; but I always imagined that Herbert was a regular woman-hater, and he gave out ever so long ago that he didn’t mean to marry. I expect Lady Jane has made up the match.’

Mrs. Pierpoint was beginning : ‘If she has, it is much to her credit——’ when Mr. Francis was announced, and she rose to shake hands with the new arrival. ‘We were just talking about your friend Mr. Herbert,’ she remarked.

‘Were you?’ said Francis. ‘Then let us talk about something else.’

‘After that, we certainly can’t talk about anything else until you have explained yourself. Don’t you approve of his marriage?’

‘Does anybody ever approve of the marriage of his best friend? Isn’t it a well-known fact that the chances are twenty to one in favour of his best friend’s wife hating him like poison? In this instance the chances may safely be counted as fifty to one, because the only time that I ever spoke to Miss Lefroy I was happily inspired to tell her that

a woman who married poor Dick from worldly motives would infallibly make him and herself miserable.'

'She is marrying him from worldly motives then?'

'Judging by the spirit in which she received my remarks I should imagine that she was; but I am not in Miss Lefroy's secrets. I shall buy a very nice wedding present for Dick; I shall see him through on the fatal day, and then bid him a tearful farewell. I give him eighteen months to repent of his bargain and return to me in sackcloth and ashes. That would bring us to just about the proper time of year for the big game in Abyssinia.'

'You are indeed a friend of the right sort. And what is Mrs. Herbert to do when you go after the big game in Abyssinia?'

'Mrs. Herbert, I take it, will amuse herself with little games in England. I don't wish to be the prophet of evil. I may be quite wrong, and they may turn out the happiest couple under the sun; but I have

opinions of my own upon the subject of matrimony in general and of Dick Herbert as a married man in particular.'

He had views, which he was rather fond of unfolding, upon most subjects, and perhaps he would have been willing to state his matrimonial views now; but it was already past six o'clock, and other visitors, before whom such subjects could not conveniently be discussed, began to drop in, one by one, until the little room was almost choked with them.

Among the latest arrivals was Miss Herbert, who was welcomed by Mrs. Pierpoint with that peculiarly affectionate cordiality which women are wont to display towards another of their sex in the presence of the man to whom they desire to marry her. Why they should behave in this manner it is not easy to discover; for the man, unless he is very dull indeed, sees and understands it all, and, as a general thing, it makes him both uncomfortable and obstinate. It is not everybody who, like Bertie Cunningham, is

prepared for all kinds of feminine stratagems and is confident of his own power to resist them.

That experienced youth knew quite well that a chair close to his would be found for Miss Herbert, and he also had good grounds for believing that Miss Herbert had a crow to pluck with him; but he did not allow these things to disturb his equanimity. He got her a cup of tea, resumed his seat, smiled pleasantly, and waited for her to begin the attack. She looked very handsome in that subdued light, and, broken-hearted though he was, it was always agreeable to him to contemplate a handsome woman. The clouds which had gathered upon her brow when she first caught sight of him began to disperse as she returned his gaze.

‘Captain Cunningham,’ said she, ‘how ought one to treat a correspondent who never answers one’s letters?’

‘Go on writing to him till he does answer, I should think,’ replied Bertie, promptly.

‘That might become monotonous. Per-

haps a simpler plan would be to give up writing to him altogether.'

'I can't help fancying,' said Bertie, 'that these observations are meant to apply in some mysterious way to me. If so, I can only say that that is the plan which you have adopted. I haven't had a letter from you for a very long time; but I am sure I answered every time that you wrote. If you didn't hear, it must have been the fault of that disgraceful post-office, which is always mislaying my correspondence. I mean to make a formal complaint to the Postmaster-General about it one of these days.'

Miss Herbert smiled. Perhaps she believed him; perhaps she only wanted to believe him. He was bending forwards, his elbow resting on his knees, and was looking up into her face with those innocent dark-blue eyes which many a woman before her had found irresistible. The most absurd of all the illusions that we cherish are those which we know to be illusions; but it not unfrequently happens that these are just the

ones with which we are most unwilling to part.

Miss Herbert drank her tea silently; the smile was still hovering about her lips as she handed the empty cup to her neighbour. In general, her voice, if not exactly harsh, was hard; but nothing could have been gentler than the intonation with which her next words were spoken. 'I wonder whether you will take the trouble to come and see me sometimes, now that I am in London.'

'Of course I will,' Bertie answered; 'where are you staying?'

She gave him one of her cards. 'Dick has taken a house for the season,' she said. 'I suppose you have heard about poor Dick?'

The young man winced slightly. 'Yes, I've heard. What in the world is he doing it for?'

'Really that is more than I can tell you. There appears to be no pretence of affection on either side.'

'I knew it!' exclaimed Bertie, off his

guard. 'I was certain that there couldn't be anything of the kind!'

'Why were you so certain?' asked Miss Herbert, suspiciously. 'Are you acquainted with the girl?'

'Well, yes; just acquainted,' answered the other, recollecting himself. 'That is, I have met her twice in my life. It didn't strike me that she was at all in Dick's style. This really ought not to be allowed to go on, you know.'

Miss Herbert laughed. 'If you think that Dick can be prevented from doing anything that he has made up his mind to do, you must have had very few opportunities of studying his character. After all, why should it not be allowed to go on? It is very unlikely that he will live and die a bachelor, and I don't know that Miss Lefroy will not suit him as well as anybody else. I was introduced to her yesterday, and I thought her a very decent sort of person.'

A decent sort of person! Bertie stroked his nascent moustache and held his tongue

with some difficulty. He valued peace too much to put the thoughts that were in him into words; but he was not sorry that the conversation at this juncture became general. When Miss Herbert took her leave he had recovered himself sufficiently to bestow that slight pressure upon her fingers which he supposed that she expected.

As soon as he and Mrs. Pierpoint were once more alone, the latter remarked drily, 'I am glad to see that you are still capable of making love to a lady who has the merit of being marriageable.'

'You call that a merit! Besides, I didn't make love to her at all—how can you say such things? I have never made love to her.'

'Oh!'

'Well, I am speaking the truth. I know what it will be; some fine day you will manage to get me into such a position that I shall be obliged to propose to Miss Herbert or some other heiress, and then I shall be nicely caught!'

‘You must acknowledge that, if I have anything to do with the catching, I shall at least be disinterested. You heard what Mr. Francis said just now about the wives of one’s best friends, and I suppose the same rule applies to the husbands. This is a peculiarly hard case, since both you and Carry Herbert are friends of mine. I wonder whether you will both show me the cold shoulder as soon as you are married.’

‘I can’t tell what she might do,’ said Cunningham; ‘but I can answer for myself. Cold shoulder wouldn’t be the word! If ever you bring such a thing about, my implacable resentment shall pursue you all the days of your mortal life.’

‘This is very sad and very discouraging,’ said Mrs. Pierpoint; ‘but I think I will take my chance all the same. Perhaps you won’t hate me; you may even live to thank me—who knows?’

CHAPTER XV.

HOPE DOES HER DUTY.

SPRING had passed imperceptibly into summer; the trees in Eaton Square were as green as London trees can contrive to be; the season was in full swing; the ceaseless turmoil of the vast city had become slightly increased in one of its quarters; a few of its inhabitants were spending hundreds and thousands of pounds upon entertainments which afforded no very keen delight to anybody; others were dying of hunger in garrets; at Westminster statesmen and would-be statesmen were calling one another bad names and occasionally doing a little business. That astonishing mixture of tragedy and farce which goes by the name of life, and which, from force of habit, none of us find astonishing,

was, in short, being enacted as usual ; and the circumstance that a single individual among those millions had rather rashly engaged herself to marry a man whom she did not love was, doubtless, trivial enough. What can it matter whether one atom in the swarm lives or dies, is happy or unhappy? Since, however, all is relative ; since the world in which we dwell is but a speck in the immensity of space, and since it and we might be extinguished to-morrow without even a momentary cessation of the music of the spheres, it is evident that we have only to apply the same theory upon a somewhat larger scale in order to convince ourselves that nothing which has ever happened upon the surface of this planet is of any consequence whatsoever—a proposition which seems too bold to be gulped down by mortal swallow. And so we return to the comforting conclusion that small things are just as important as great, and that Hope Lefroy's destiny was at least of supreme consequence to herself.

There were moments when she felt it to

be so ; but for the most part she allowed herself to float down the stream of fate, not without a restful sense of relief in the thought that her struggles against the current were ended. Herbert came to see her from time to time—not by any means every day ; Gertrude endeavoured, with more or less of success, to interest her in the purchase of her trousseau ; Lady Jane purred over her contentedly ; the more distant members of the Lefroy clan came to offer their felicitations and their wedding gifts ; the days slipped away somehow or other and were not such bad days, taking them all in all. She went as little as possible into the world, the comparative recency of her father's death giving her an excuse for declining invitations ; but she could hardly refuse to be present at her aunt's annual ball, and it was upon that occasion that she encountered Captain Cunningham for the first time since her engagement.

It must be confessed that the sight of the young guardsman agitated her a little for a moment ; he himself was agitated, and pos-

sibly did not try very hard to veil his agitation. But it was rather her memory than her heart that was stirred, and she speedily regained her self-possession. 'No, thanks!' she said, in answer to his immediate request, 'I am not going to dance to-night.'

'Oh, but just once!—for the sake of old times,' he pleaded.

'Well, perhaps once,' she answered, hesitatingly. 'But not now; later in the evening, if you're disengaged then,' and with that she turned away.

After all why should she not have just one last dance? Without quite knowing it, she looked forward to her marriage in much the same way that many people look forward to death—as the end of everything, a huge barrier, beyond which there may or may not be some new kind of happiness, but surely no renewal of dancing or laughter or other frivolous delights.

Cunningham was too adroit, or too much engaged, to claim the promised dance before two o'clock in the morning, the consequence

of which was that he was awaited with some little impatience. He looked sad and interesting; he said very little, but placed his arm round his partner's waist, and, as she was whirled away into the throng, it seemed to her for an instant as if careless youth had come back, and all the events of the past year might be forgotten, and she might fancy herself at her first ball again.

An insignificant circumstance interfered with the continuance of this illusion. The house in which Hope had first been introduced to London society had been a very large one, whereas that in Eaton Square was only of moderate size. In so restricted a space collisions could with difficulty be avoided, and anything like the poetry of motion was quite unattainable. After making the circuit of the room once, Hope paused, and, disengaging herself from her partner, declared with a touch of petulance that it was out of the question to dance in the midst of such a rabble. 'We may as well sit down,' she said, and suited the action to the word.

‘ Ah ! ’ sighed Cunningham, as he followed her example, ‘ if we could only go back to this time last year ! ’

‘ That is just what I was thinking ; it seems so much more than a year ago ! ’

‘ I suppose it wouldn’t make much difference if we could,’ the young man said with another sigh ; ‘ what must be will be. Only, so long as things haven’t actually happened, it always seems as if other things might be possible, don’t you know ? ’

To this incoherent sentiment Hope made no reply, and he continued : ‘ I wonder what we shall be doing this time next year. Probably I shall be wishing that I could have this evening back again. Next year you will be Mrs. Herbert, and perhaps your husband won’t let you dance.’

‘ I don’t think Mr. Herbert is likely to lay any prohibitions upon me,’ answered Hope, coldly.

She was not pleased with him for alluding to her marriage. There are certain reticences for which women are always grateful, and she

had credited Cunningham with some delicacy in that he had refrained from offering her any empty congratulations. Of course he must suspect what her motives for marrying were, and, as he was no relation of hers, of course he could see no cause for rejoicing in such a match. But he might have let the subject alone.

Fortunately he did not seem inclined to pursue it. His next words were: 'Do you remember that day last winter when I met you in the Park?'

'Quite well,' answered Hope.

'And I told you I should get your people to ask me down to Helston at Christmas. How I wish I had!'

'We should all have been glad to see you; but most likely you were better amused hunting in Leicestershire with your friend Mrs. Pierpoint.'

'How did you know that I was there?'

asked the young man in some astonishment.

'Everything is known. Did you wish it to remain a secret?'

‘Oh, dear, no ! there is no secret about it. Pierpoint told me I could ride his horses while he was away, so I went down to Melton for a few weeks and stayed with a cousin of mine. Only I thought, from the way you spoke—that is, I hope you know that I would a thousand times rather have been at Helston than in Leicestershire.’

‘Really ? I can’t quite understand why.’

But in truth she did understand what he meant her to infer ; and, if she had not, the eloquent expression which he now threw into his eyes would have enlightened her. This knowledge, however, did not cause her heart to beat any the faster. Captain Cunningham might possibly, under different conditions, have become something to her ; but he was nothing to her now—she was quite sure of that—nor did she believe much in his sincerity. No doubt the impassioned gaze with which she was at that moment being honoured had been directed at half-a-dozen sets of features in the course of the evening. But there she did him an injustice. Had he been less

seriously in love with her, he would not have hesitated to be a good deal more explicit ; but Hope was not to him what other women were, and since he could no more ask her to throw Herbert over and marry him than he could propose to a princess of the blood royal, he heroically refrained from going beyond hints and glances ; which, according to his code, was no small concession to the behests of duty.

These meeting with no response, the conversation gradually languished. Neither he nor she felt altogether at ease ; the interview was a disappointment to both of them, and Hope was not sorry when Herbert lounged up to her side and put an end to it. With Herbert she did feel at ease ; never was there a less exacting *fiancé*. If she happened to be in a talkative mood, he sat and listened to her with apparent pleasure ; if, on the other hand, she preferred to remain silent, that seemed to suit him quite equally well. She told herself a dozen times a day that she ought to be very thankful and that she never could have got

on so smoothly with anyone else in the world. It was necessary that she should tell herself this, because every now and then he provoked her to an extent for which she was puzzled to account ; and indeed, although storms are not to be desired, there are few tempers capable of holding out against a perpetual equatorial calm.

There was no disturbing Dick Herbert's good humour : otherwise he might have been made a little anxious by the fits of nervous irritability to which Hope became subject as the day of her marriage drew nearer 'Do you realise what you are doing?' she asked him suddenly once ; 'do you know that you are marrying a woman who has the makings of a termagant in her?' He smiled and replied that he was willing to run that risk.

On another occasion she besought him to tell her whether he did not in his heart believe it to be wicked to marry without love. 'It must be wicked—I am sure it must be ! Though I don't think the Bible says anything about it.'

‘Neither the Bible nor I have a word to say against the practice,’ Dick answered.

‘But perhaps you think it wrong, though you don’t say so. Wouldn’t you like to be off your bargain? Come!—there is still time.’

‘Well—hardly, is there? Think of the feelings of your family.’

Hope burst into an hysterical laugh. ‘What *would* they do to me! It would be almost worth while to break the engagement off, if only for the sake of passing through such a startling experience. But of course I am talking nonsense,’ she added, becoming grave again. ‘I should never have the moral courage to retreat now; perhaps, if I had had any moral courage, I should never have advanced. It has all been your doing from first to last.’

‘I don’t mind accepting the entire responsibility,’ said Dick.

That was the worst of him: he didn’t mind anything. It was this unreasonable complaint that Hope inwardly formulated

against a man who let her do exactly what she pleased now, and who would in all probability continue to let her do what she pleased hereafter. Unquestionably such a treasure was thrown away upon her; and so, in truth, her friends appeared to think. When they came to congratulate her, they one and all expatiated upon Dick's good qualities, and had an unflattering way of implying that she was a great deal more lucky than she deserved to be. Even Mills, who could not be accused of undervaluing her former mistress, was abundantly satisfied with the match and spoke of Mr. Herbert in terms of such extravagant, not to say ignorant, eulogy that Hope could not help calling attention to one small defect of his. 'He is sixteen years older than I am, you know, Mills.'

'And a very good thing too, Miss Hope. I don't feel no confidence in young men, nor yet no respect for 'em,' said Mrs. Mills, whose own husband was considerably her junior. 'What you want,' she went on, 'is somebody

to take care of you ; and that Mr. Herbert will do. I'd a deal sooner it was him than the other.'

'What other?' Hope inquired.

'Why, him as you walked with that day in the park, my dear. I was took with him at first, I don't deny, for I have always been partial to good looks, having none myself; but when I come to think it over, I didn't feel so sure of him. No, my dear; it's best as it is, you may depend.'

'The gentleman whom you speak of never asked me to marry him,' said Hope; 'and no doubt everything that happens is always for the best. At all events, you will be a gainer, you poor old Mills, for you won't be dragged away from your duties any more now to sit in artists' studios all the morning.'

'The Lord be praised for that!' ejaculated Mills piously. 'Not that I grudged the time, as well you know, Miss Hope; but, dear me! it wasn't the right thing at all for a young lady like you to be going to such places. I felt so all along, though it wasn't for me to

speaking ; and that there Mr. Tristram, I believe he thought the same as I did.'

'Very likely,' answered Hope.

She had no doubt that Tristram, in common with everybody else, held that opinion. In her inexperience she had imagined that it might possibly be the right thing to earn her own bread ; but evidently this was not so. The right thing was to remain, by hook or by crook, in the station to which she had been born ; the right thing was to be rich. If riches did not chance in her case to be synonymous with bliss, that was her own fault. The consciousness of duty performed should be sufficient for all well-ordered minds.

It was in the very last days of her spinsterhood that Hope held the above colloquy with Mills. She had gone to Henrietta Street to take leave of her old nurse and her old rooms, and had contemplated continuing her pilgrimage to South Kensington in order to take leave also of her old master. But now she gave up that idea. What would be the good ? What pleasure could there be in

hearing conventionalities from the unconventional Tristram? These might more appropriately be spoken after the ceremony, to which he had been invited and at which she presumed that he would be present. So she went straight back to Eaton Square and shed a few tears in private.

No modern Joshua being at hand to arrest the remorseless progress of time, the sun rose punctually at 4.30 A.M. on Hope's wedding-morning to pursue his wonted course of shining upon the just and upon the unjust, in the former class of which persons might surely be included a young woman whose faltering steps had led her at last into what she believed to be the path of duty. When he sank once more beneath the horizon-line Hope Lefroy had become Mrs. Herbert, and Lady Jane, resting from her labours, breathed a fervent thanksgiving that the proceedings of the day had passed off without a hitch.

The good lady had not felt quite sure that there would be no hitch ; but that numbness of the whole nervous system which is often

brought about by a crisis, and which is no bad substitute for courage, enabled Hope to bear herself from first to last with the most creditable composure. Her wedding was only a little less magnificent than that of her cousin had been. Dukes and duchesses were not quite so well represented at it, and the reporters of the daily papers appeared at the church in somewhat diminished numbers; but the requisite bishop was not lacking, nor had any expense been spared in the way of floral decoration. Dick Herbert, in a new suit of clothes, got through his task with ease and distinction, supported by the dissatisfied Francis, who had assumed a smiling mien in spite of his dissatisfaction. The only thing that Hope afterwards remembered to have seen during the service was Tristram's shaggy head rising above a sea of others, and she noticed that he was studying the scene with a pensive, melancholy air, as if thinking that a picture might possibly be made out of it. But it was certain that Tristram would never paint anything so hopelessly commonplace as

a fashionable wedding. He said something to her—she did not clearly understand what—when he shook hands with her after the rite was concluded. There were so many people to be shaken hands with and so many meaningless words to be listened to!

However, the ordeal did not last long. Hope, placing herself in the hands of the new maid who had been engaged for her, exchanged her bridal array for a travelling-dress; immediately after which she seemed to wake out of a trance and found that she was seated beside her husband in a brougham, moving rapidly towards the station, whence they were to depart for Folkestone and the Continent.

She faced round upon him with quivering lips and dilated eyes. ‘Now,’ she exclaimed, ‘I hope you are satisfied!’

‘It seemed the best thing to do,’ he answered calmly.

Then she turned away, looking out of the window, and did not speak again until the short drive was at an end.

Gertrude, when the company had dispersed, was moved by curiosity to put an indiscreet question to her mother. 'Mamma, do you think they will be happy, those two?'

'They have everything to make them so,' Lady Jane declared boldly.

'Not quite everything, have they? I suppose he must be fond of her; but she has said from the beginning that she is not the least in love with him. It seems rather dreadful! I hope I shall not marry a man whom I don't care for.'

'I sincerely hope not, my dear,' said Lady Jane; 'I should never venture to advise anyone to do that. And yet love is not so absolutely essential as young people are apt to think. I have known many instances in which people who have married from—other motives have got on very well.' She sighed faintly. Perhaps she did not speak upon the subject without some personal knowledge of it to guide her. 'At all events,' she concluded cheerfully, 'it is a thousand times

better for Hope to be living at Farndon and mixing in the society to which she has been accustomed, than masquerading about London in the disguise of a female artist.'

Mr. Lefroy walked down to his club, where he met several of his late guests. 'Well, Lefroy,' said one of them, 'you look very beaming. Has the Birmingham Caucus been swallowed up by an earthquake?'

'No,' answered Mr. Lefroy; 'but I've married my niece to one of the best fellows that ever stepped.'

'Quite so; but you might have married her to anybody, for that matter. To my mind, hers is far and away the most beautiful face that has been seen in London this year.'

'Well, yes,' assented Mr. Lefroy. 'Oh, yes, she is perfect to look at, certainly; still I don't mind admitting to you that I'm glad to get her off my hands. No vice, you understand; but awkward to drive—very awkward to drive.'

'And you think she'll go steadier in double harness, eh?'

‘I haven’t a doubt of it. She’ll go steady enough now—no more shying or bolting. Only I’m not sure—this is strictly between ourselves, of course—I’m not *quite* sure that I should care to change places with Dick Herbert.’

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

(G & C.)

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